THEME

**The Role of Beauty in Being
and Becoming Human**

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REVIEWS & NEWS

INTRODUCTION

Beauty is a term that belongs to the traditional triad (goodness, truth, and beauty) and is also discussed in modern theology – just think of the work *Herrlichkeit* by the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, which, however, has remained on the fringes of the theological mainstream. More often, it is dealt with in disciplines such as art history, historiography, or aesthetics, emphasising the historical and changing aspect of beauty, the notion of beauty and ugliness in modernity, changes in the understanding of beauty and the nature of art, the basis of which lies not in craftsmanship but in originality, provocation, and the breaking of various stereotypes and taboos.

The multidisciplinary aspects of the concept of beauty was the focus of an international doctoral and postdoctoral conference held in Prague from 19 to 22 May, organised by two institutions: The University Centre of Excellence: Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective (UK, UNCE No. 204052) and Masaryk University (MU). The event was held under the title 'The Role of Beauty in Being and Becoming Human', by which the organisers wanted to emphasise the anthropological dimension of the topic.

In this journal section, we present three papers from this conference.

The first article of this block is the work of two authors, Dávid Cielontko and Jan Zámečník, who thematise the important question of the relationship between beauty and ugliness, or the search for a possible harmony and reconciliation between the two phenomena. At first sight, it would seem that this is a question that is only posed by modernity, in literature, for example, in Charles Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*. In Christian theology, however, this theme is already present

in Old Testament texts, especially in the prophet Isaiah, who writes of a divine servant who has 'neither form nor beauty', who is 'ugly' in that he bears little resemblance to a human being. In this prefigurement, Christian theology sees a martyred, scourged, and scorned Christ, who suffered for our sins.

In the second text, written in essayistic form, three areas in which the 'dying of beauty' is manifested today are thematised. These are the current area of the destruction of nature, the area of possible destruction (or perhaps the emptiness of form and the abandonment of craftsmanship) in modern art, and the area of the destruction of language. The author Jiří Hanuš gives concrete examples from all three areas (the dying of forests, the pursuit of originality and the breaking of taboos in art, and the destruction of language by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes) and reflects on how interdisciplinary thinking can contribute to a remedy in these directions.

The third of the articles, a text by Pavol Bargár, addresses the essential question of transformation (change of mind) from a Christian perspective, using the example of one of the successful films of American cinema, *The Power of the Dog*. This 2021 film by writer-director Jane Campion, starring actor Benedict Cumberbatch, is an intimate drama that is not merely a Western set piece – it is really about interpersonal relationships and the possibility of human change. It shows that art films are capable of an actualisation that invites reflection on essential questions, including philosophical and theological ones.

These three articles are only a taste and a small part of what was said at the spring conference in Prague. Events of this type include not only the presentation of papers but also and above all, the discussions and 'behind the scenes' debates that complete the atmosphere of the whole enterprise. And the conference on beauty, whose main initiator was Professor Ivana Noble from the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, was one of such events with an inspiring atmosphere.

Jiří Hanuš

THEME

**The Role of Beauty in Being
and Becoming Human**

WHEN YOU DO NOT FIT IN: UGLINESS AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM*

DÁVID CIELONTKO, JAN ZÁMEČNÍK

ABSTRACT

The article draws attention to the ethical and pastoral dangers associated with the theological subordination of ugliness to other purposes, such as universal harmony and order, the search for the immutable, or divination. It also traces the tendency to conflate moral and aesthetic ugliness, which has led to the marginalisation or even persecution of others on the basis of their outward appearance. As a counterpoint to these tendencies, the article emphasises the idea of the ugly suffering servant Christ, which contains pastoral and countercultural potential.

Keywords

Ugliness; Beauty; Marginalisation; Subversive ethics; Pastoral care; Suffering servant; Jews; Witches

Among the important themes that have received well-deserved attention in theological discourse are undoubtedly the values of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Traditionally, theologians have recognised them in the ordered cosmos as well as in individual creatures and understood them as a reflection of the qualities of the Creator,

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who embodies them in full. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* aptly captures this tendency:

> All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. The manifold perfections of creatures – their truth, their goodness, their beauty – all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently, we can name God by taking his creatures' perfections as our starting point, 'for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator'.[1]

The effort to find traces of God in the beauty of creation and to give it deep religious meaning is theologically understandable and has produced many remarkable ideas. But focusing on beauty also has its flipside, which cannot be ignored, as it has sometimes led to the subordination of the ugly to the beautiful or even paved the way for its marginalisation and demonisation. In this article, we want to focus on this phenomenon. Specifically, we will look at human ugliness as it is subjectively perceived, either from the individual's own perspective or from the perspective of others. What is relevant for us is that the ugly can be, and often has been, considered inferior, with all the negative implications that this may entail. However, it is not our aim to provide a definition of ugliness since we believe that it is a generally recognisable phenomenon. Ugliness can be conceived, for example, as a disturbing disharmony of features or a certain type of disfigurement, but its understanding is subject to cultural variations and related to individual perceptions and is therefore a much more complex category that is difficult to grasp. We also want to note that although our paper focuses on what can be regarded as an aesthetical phenomenon, our primary interest is in providing the pastoral and ethical impetus. Therefore, our aim is not to delve into the aesthetics of human appearance, psychological discussions of self-perception, or to address standards for beauty and ugliness. We start from the simple premise that there is a general, albeit always culturally conditioned, human experience of ugliness as well as the painful experience of persons who are considered ugly by others.

For example, those who suffer from a noticeable defect that makes them unsightly may internalise certain cultural stereotypes and feel

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[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.; Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 17, par. 41.

inferior. Yet, the cause of such a self-perception may not be related only to the common exaltation of beauty. If we look into history and especially into Christian religious tradition, we can discover the deeply religious roots of the extolling of beauty and the beautiful, as already evidenced by the ancient Jewish and Christian texts. These texts quite unanimously associate God, heavenly beings and the heavens with all-encompassing beauty. According to the Psalmist, God is 'the perfection of beauty',[2] and the later apocalyptic literature offers us insight into the colourful images of the heavens and celestial beings, which are depicted in superlatives of beauty.[3] Beauty is also an integral part of the protological[4] and eschatological representation of humanity in its perfection. In such a context, ugliness is an unfitting and problematic aberration that needs to be explained theologically.

In this paper, we would like to discuss the problematic aspects of the way ugliness has been, and sometimes still is, dealt with in theology, and, in particular, the risks involved in some theological responses to the 'problem of ugliness'. In addition, we would like to contribute to this topic by attempting to offer one Christological corrective related to the notion of an ugly Jesus.

1. Subordination of the Individual to the Larger Whole or to Another Goal

First, we want to point out that the difficulty with some theological responses to the phenomenon of ugliness is that they do not pay attention to the individual. It goes without saying that theologians address the problem of ugliness abstractly and generally. However, these solutions should not at the same time be insensitive, even insulting and cruel to the perspective of the individual to whom they might be applied. Such solutions can be seen in some approaches that implicitly or explicitly attribute significance to ugliness in the context of a larger whole or explain the existence of 'anomalous' human beings as a form of omens.

The first approach is present in some of Augustine's works. Augustine holds that ugliness contributes to the higher value of harmony and

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[2] Cf. Ps 50:2. See also Ps 27:4, Is 33:17, Ez 1, Wis 13:5.
[3] E.g., *2. Baruch* 51:3.9–10; *Testament of Abraham* 2:4. On the depiction of beauty in the Book of Revelation, see Pieter G. R. de Villiers, 'Beauty in the Book of Revelation: On Biblical Spirituality and Aesthetics,' *Spiritus* 19, no. 1 (2019): 1–20.
[4] See, e.g., *Sibylline Oracles* 1:22–24.

order. He does not classify ugliness as bad but as less good in comparison to what is beautiful because ugliness preserves less measure, form, and order.[5] However, he does not always think of ugliness only as an aesthetic category but sometimes also looks at it through an ethical lens. For example, when he writes that there are repulsive parts of animal bodies, it is clear that he thinks purely in aesthetic terms because these parts are not moral agents. What is important for Augustine is that they are necessary for the proper functioning of the organism. The significance of the ugly is thus explained by the fact that it is an indispensable part of the whole. However, when Augustine transfers this analogy to human society, he has already crossed over to the ethical level. In his view, a well-managed society cannot do without ugly elements such as executioners or harlots. Although the executioner is 'cruel' and the harlot is 'foul' and 'devoid of dignity', they play essential roles within the whole of the social organism.[6]

This Augustine's emphasis on the functional role of ugliness for higher goals is also evident in his reflection on the impermanence of physical beauty, which Irina Metzler aptly summarises:

> Divine providence shows that corporal beauty is the lesser beauty, since providence also has such beauty accompanied by pain and sickness, deformation of limbs and loss of colour, so that thereby (by the mutability of the body) we are reminded to seek the immutable.[7]

From these considerations, only the last one directly concerns the physical appearance of human beings, but as in the case of the ugly parts of the animal body, we observe the same logic here: the aesthetically ugly is explained by its higher purpose. Although this line of thought is profound and in many ways inspiring, there is a significant danger here, namely that we overlook the individual reality and experience of

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[5] See Augustine, *On the Nature of Good*, 3.
[6] See Augustine, *On Order*, IV,12–13. Aquinas also refers to this image in a paraphrase of Augustine's description: 'Thus, Augustine says that a whore acts in the world as the bilge in a ship or the sewer in a palace: "Remove the sewer, and you will fill the palace with a stench." Similarly, concerning the bilge, he says: "Take away whores from the world, and you will fill it with sodomy."' (*De Regimine Principium* IV,14.6). Cited from Ptolemy of Lucca and Thomas Aquinas, *On the Government of Rulers – De Regimine Principium*, trans. James M. Blythe (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1997), 254.
[7] Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment in the High Middle Ages, c.1100–c.1400* (London: Routledge, 2006), 49. See Augustine, *True Religion*, XL,75.

a person who painfully copes with his or her ugliness. Augustine's explanation that their ugliness serves a greater harmony in the world order or the search for the immutable is not likely to be a comforting response to their suffering and feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, a similar explanation of aesthetic and ethical ugliness – as in the case of an executioner or harlot on the one hand and animal parts on the other – can also give the impression that aesthetic and ethical ugliness are somehow related.

The second approach, namely the symbolic understanding of ugliness, can be illustrated in the example of Isidore of Seville and Conrad Lycosthenes. In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore of Seville devotes an entire section to 'portents', in which he discusses new-borns with various 'defects' as omens of God pointing to the future:

> Varro defines portents as beings that seem to have been born contrary to nature – but they are not contrary to nature, because they are created by divine will, since the nature of everything is the will of the Creator. Whence even the pagans address God sometimes as 'Nature' (*Natura*), sometimes as 'God.' A portent is therefore not created contrary to nature, but contrary to what is known nature. Portents are also called signs, omens, and prodigies, because they are seen to portend and display, indicate and predict future events. The term 'portent' (*portentum*) is said to be derived from foreshadowing (*portendere*), that is, from 'showing beforehand' (*praeostendere*). 'Signs' (*ostentum*), because they seem to show (*ostendere*) a future event. Prodigies (*prodigium*) are so called, because they 'speak hereafter' (*porro dicere*), that is, they predict the future … Some portents seem to have been created as indications of future events, for God sometimes wants to indicate what is to come through some defects in new-borns, and also through dreams and oracles, by which he may foreshadow and indicate future calamity for certain peoples or individuals, as is indeed proved by abundant experience.[8]

Similarly, in his famous, lavishly illustrated treatise *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon*, Conrad Lycosthenes depicts various individuals who did not have the commonly expected appearance, such as physically impaired people or human beings born as Siamese twins. Building upon the ancient tradition of physiognomy, which considered the unusual shapes of the human body as the signs of future events,

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[8] Isidore of Sevilla, *Etymologies*, IV,3,1–5. Cited from Stephen A. Barney et al., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243–244.

he sees these anomalous beings as both members of the human race and divine omens.

These theological-cultural approaches have in common that they subordinate individual cases of ugliness to a higher purpose that is meant to give importance to ugliness. Augustine understands ugliness as a necessary component of the complex whole of harmony and order or as an incentive to search for the immutable. And for Isidore and Lycosthenes, ugliness becomes God's numinous language that has an oracular role.

In both cases, ugliness is instrumentalised for the sake of another value. The meaning of the concrete and the specific is thus marginalised or neglected. This approach stands in sharp contrast to our contemporary perspective, which pays much more attention to the experience of individuals who face internal pain or external rejection due to their ugliness.

Fig. 1: C. Lycosthenes, *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon*

As we believe, it is necessary to listen to the voice of these neglected and thus follow in the footsteps of the tradition of subversive ethics[9] that forms the core of liberation theology, feminist theology, and similar currents. This approach gives a voice to the overlooked and prioritises the individual over the 'totalitarian'. While this perspective has been reflected in many areas, including social justice and equality, we believe it also needs to be taken into account in theological reflection on ugliness.

2. Ugliness and Marginalisation

Although Augustine and other theologians understood ugliness only as a *lesser good*, not an *evil*, the category of ugliness is nevertheless historically connected to the demonisation of others. The religious association of the ugly with evil is mirrored in works of art that depict Satan as a visually hideous and terrifying being.[10] However, the connection between ugliness and moral evil is not only found in the visual arts.[11] When John Calvin wrote that nature and 'flesh' bear the marks of the 'ugly deformity' after the Fall, he was not referring to the aesthetic but to the ethical realm.[12] Unfortunately, some Protestant texts and sermons, and even non-theologically oriented works, have taken this metaphor into the physical realm, describing repulsive bodies as evidence of corruption by sin.[15] In this context, Naomi Baker points to an encyclopedic work for women entitled *The Ladies Dictionary* (1694), where ugly bodies are understood as fallen, with their ugliness or disfigurement to be removed only at the resurrection. William Sanderson writes similarly in his drawing manual *Graphice* (1658): 'True beauty in any Creature, is not to be found, being full of deformed disproportions,

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[9]   See Samuel Wells, Ben Quash, and Rebekah Eklund, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (2nd ed.; Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 159–195.

[10] A good example is the depiction of Satan devouring the damned in hell in the painting by Fra Angelico *The Last Judgement* (1431).

[11] Naturally, even a depiction of the ugly can be aesthetically beautiful. As Eco notes, 'in any case a principle is admitted that is observed almost uniformly: although ugly creatures and things exist, art has the power to portray them in a beautiful way, and the Beauty of this imitation makes Ugliness acceptable.' Umberto Eco, *On Beauty* (London: Seeker & Warburg, 2004), 133. However, this topic is beyond the scope of our inquiry.

[12] John Calvin, *Institutiones*, I,15.4. See Naomi Baker, *Plain Ugly: The Unattractive Body in Early Modern Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 43.

[15] See Charles H. Parker, 'Diseased Bodies, Defiled Souls: Corporality and Religious Difference in the Reformation,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2014): 1265–1297, doi: 10.1086/679783.

far remote from truth; for Sinne is the cause of deformity.'[14] This general concept of the ugliness of the created beings is connected with original sin rather than with individual sin. Most theologians have resistedre the idea that there is any or at least a clear connection between ugliness and particular sins. After all, even some saints were not physically attractive.[15] However, some theologians opened the door to the dangerous idea that physical ugliness might indicate a defective human character. As Irina Metzler writes,

> Albertus Magnus opined that the physical appearance of a person can influence their character, qualifying this remark, however, by adding that this does not make a person behave in a certain way *absolutely*. This means a person retains an element of free will, so that instead individuals should strive to overcome the negative effects of physical blemishes. According to Albertus Magnus, the soul moves the body in many ways; conversely, the parts of the body can pervert or corrupt in different ways the activities of the soul. These sorts of sentiments pave the way for the view that there is an interplay between soul and body, and possessing an impaired, defective, disfigured or simply an ugly body can mean that such a person also has a defective, that is, evil, soul.[16]

There is no dispute that such a concept, which is itself misguided, can also be severely abused. If the depravity of the human heart is mirrored in external, physical form, those we wish to label as morally corrupt can also be easily portrayed as ugly. In other words, the combination of moral and visual ugliness can become a tool of propaganda and repression, as we, unfortunately, know well from history. Particularly notorious in this sense is the depiction and representation of witches and Jews.

For instance, a Nazi propagandist Julius Streicher, in his anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, denigrated Jews by using fictitious

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[14] Baker, *Plain Ugly*, 43.
[15] The apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* describes Paul quite ambiguously as 'a man short in stature, with a bald head, bowed legs, in good condition, eyebrows that met, a fairly large nose, and full of grace' (APTh 3). Cited from Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 114.
[16] Metzler, *Disability*, 54. See Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, I,2,2.

information such as the ritual ingestion of the blood of non-Jews.[17] These dark denunciations were accompanied by crude caricatures.[18] One of them depicts Jews with conspicuously large noses and bloodthirsty expressions that recall the demonic features of the individuals who watch suffering Jesus in Hieronymus Bosch's famous painting *Christ Carrying the Cross*.[19] Another means of denigrating Jews was to associate them – both metaphorically and visually – with animals considered unclean, parasitic, blood-thirsty, and repulsive. This is amply illustrated by Charles Patterson, who states:

> John Roth and Michael Berenbaum write that Nazi propaganda constantly described Jews as 'parasites, vermin, beasts of prey – in a word, subhuman'. In 1932, the year before the Nazis came to power, great enthusiasm greeted a Nazi speech in Charlottenburg, a wealthy Berlin district, when the speaker called Jews *insects* who needed to be exterminated. In the Nazi propaganda film *Der Ewige Jude* ('The Eternal Jew'), which opens with footage of a mass of swarming rats, the narrator explains, 'Just as the rat is the lowest of animals, the Jew is the lowest of human beings'.[20]

Clearly, the stereotypes associated with visual ugliness here are meant to demonstrate moral ugliness.[21] We can illustrate the same stereotypisation in the case of witches, who were not infrequently depicted as hideous, old women.[22] An example of such a visualisation

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[17] See Randall L. Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher. The Man who Persuaded a Nation to Hate Jews* (New York: Dorset Press, 1983).

[18] Most of these caricatures were drawn by a German anti-Semitic cartoonist Philipp Rupprecht, known as *Fips*. See Carl-Eric Linsler, 'Stürmer-Karikaturen,' in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Bd. 7: Literatur, Film, Theater und Kunst*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 477–480.

[19] Cf. Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoat and the Holocaust* (Continuum: New York – London, 2000), 62.

[20] Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (Lantern Books, New York, 2002), 46. See also Bein's analysis of the image of the 'Jewish parasite' in the Nazi ideology in Alex Bein, 'The Jewish Parasite,' *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck* 9, no. 1 (1964): 3–40.

[21] For more, see Jay Geller, *Bestiarium Judaicum: Unnatural Histories of the Jews* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

[22] As Gregory shows, English pamphleteers in the 16th and 17th centuries portrayed women accused of witchcraft as ugly and old. Yet court records show that these were primarily women of influence, and this depiction was probably purposeful. See Annabel Gregory. 'Poor, Old, and Ugly? Portrayal of Witches in 16th- and 17th-century Pamphlets,' *History Today* 66, no. 8 (2016): 41–47. See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 82.

is Albrecht Dürer's painting of a witch riding backwards on a goat. This kind of depiction has created a very dangerous stereotype that could lead – and often, unfortunately, has led – to terrible deeds, to which Umberto Eco refers: 'in most cases, the many victims of the stake were accused of witchcraft because they were ugly.'[25] There is little doubt about the religious underpinnings of this demonisation. It is telling enough that in the background of the above-mentioned caricature in *Der Stürmer*, we see three crosses as an allusion to the Passion story, probably referring to the alleged role played by the Jews in it.

Fig. 2: Julius Streicher, *Der Stürmer*

The demonisation of the ugly has another very dangerous consequence, namely the viewing of the ugly as a threat. An illustrative example *par excellence* offers the character of Quasimodo in Victor

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25   Umberto Eco, *On Ugliness* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 212.

Hugo's famous novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame.* Quasimodo is characterised by loyalty and devotion, but he is known to everyone especially for his physical ugliness, which is why people fear him, as this excerpt from Hugo's novel shows:

> When this species of cyclops appeared on the threshold of the chapel, motionless, squat, and almost as broad as he was tall; squared on the base, as a great man says; with his doublet half red, half violet, sown with silver bells, and, above all, in the perfection of his ugliness, the populace recognized him on the instant, and shouted with one voice,
> ' 'Tis Quasimodo, the bellringer! 'tis Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre-Dame! Quasimodo, the one-eyed! Quasimodo, the bandy-legged! Noel! Noel!'
> It will be seen that the poor fellow had a choice of surnames.
> 'Let the women with child beware!' shouted the scholars.
> 'Or those who wish to be,' resumed Joannes.
> The women did, in fact, hide their faces.
> 'Oh! the horrible monkey!' said one of them.
> 'As wicked as he is ugly,' retorted another.
> 'He's the devil,' added a third.
> 'I have the misfortune to live near Notre-Dame; I hear him prowling round the eaves by night.'
> 'With the cats.'
> 'He's always on our roofs.'
> 'He throws spells down our chimneys.'
> 'The other evening, he came and made a grimace at me through my attic window. I thought that it was a man. Such a fright as I had!'
> 'I'm sure that he goes to the witches' sabbath. Once he left a broom on my leads.'
> 'Oh! what a displeasing hunchback's face!'
> 'Oh! what an ill-favored soul!'
> 'Whew!'[24]

It can hardly be doubted that the association of ugliness with the Fall and moral corruption is *much more* dangerous than the subordination of the ugly to another purpose. Indeed, the consequence of such a conception may be not only the marginalisation of ugly people but

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[24] Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (San Diego: Icon Classics, 2005), 58.

also moral vilification, the legitimisation of violence, and even extermination. Modern history is replete with examples where violence and cruelty towards other human beings have been either motivated or accompanied by the portrayal of victims as ugly, disgusting, and repulsive 'vermins'. Through these depictions, the aggressors clearly sought to deny their humanity and the moral duties and responsibilities associated with it.

3. Remembering the Ugly Christ

As we have seen, the theological problem of ugliness has been dealt with in many unfortunate ways that do not take into account the individual's situation. Nevertheless, we would like not only to point out the issues associated with some theological and cultural responses to the problem of ugliness but also to offer a Christological insight that may serve at least as a partial corrective to the marginalisation of ugliness. We find this stimulus in the song of the suffering servant of the Lord in Isaiah 52–53:

> He had no form or beauty. But his form was without honor, failing beyond all men, a man being in calamity and knowing how to bear sickness; because his face is turned away, he was dishonored and not esteemed. This one bears our sins and suffers pain for us, and we accounted him to be in trouble and calamity and ill-treatment. But he was wounded because of our acts of lawlessness and has been weakened because of our sins; upon him was the discipline of our peace; by his bruise we were healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; a man has strayed in his own way, and the Lord gave him over to our sins. And he, because he has been ill-treated, does not open his mouth; like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before the one shearing it, so he does not open his mouth. (Isa. 53:2–7 NETS[25])

The New Testament writers viewed this section of the Old Testament as a typological prophecy of Jesus' Passion (Rom. 4:25; Mk. 8:31; 1 Cor. 15:3–4). Interestingly, in the context of the Passion, the New Testament writers omit the servant's *ugly appearance* altogether in their

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[25] Since the Church Fathers drew on the text of the Septuagint, we present a translation based on it.

references and allusions. Physical disfigurement due to the violence suffered is therefore present only implicitly.[26]

Despite this, the Church Fathers deal with the idea of an unsightly servant Jesus because, unlike the New Testament writers, they do not selectively choose 'appropriate' quotations from Isaiah's song but embrace it in its entirety. Thus, they must address the potential difficulties inherent in the idea of Jesus' ugliness. They query how it is possible to combine the divine and the ugly. The urgency of this question is evident from the polemics and rebukes to which Origen responds in his work *Against Celsus*. According to Origen, the Greek philosopher Celsus, after whom the work is named, wrote that

> if a divine spirit was in a body, it must certainly have differed from other bodies in size or beauty or strength or voice or striking appearance or powers of persuasion. For it is impossible that a body which had something more divine than the rest should be no different from any other. Yet Jesus' body was no different from any other, but, as they say, was little and ugly and undistinguished.[27]

It is obvious that the image of the ugly and mutilated Christ is far from the ideal of beauty and goodness, so it does not resemble the perfect harmony of both values, which the Greeks called *kalokagathia*.[28] This fact is even more evident if we compare this image with the prevailing concepts of the Greek and Roman gods. As evidenced by their extant ancient statues, these gods were regarded as models of supreme beauty. In contrast, as Georg Hegel states in his *Aesthetics*:

> Christ scourged, with the crown of thorns, carrying his cross to the place of execution, nailed to the cross, passing away in the agony of a torturing and slow death – this cannot be portrayed in the forms of Greek beauty.[29]

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[26] See Marc Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant: Before and After Christianity,' *Interpretation* 73, no. 2 (2019): 158–173, at 165–168. doi: 10.1177/0020964318820594.

[27] Celsus in Origen, *Against Celsus*. VI,75. Cited from Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 388.

[28] See Eco, *On Beauty*, 42–47; Eco, *On Ugliness*, 23–33.

[29] Cited from Georg W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 538. On Christian visualisations of the Suffering Servant, see Martin O'Kane, 'Picturing "The Man of Sorrows": The Passion-filled Afterlives of a Biblical Icon,' *Religion and the Arts* 9, no. 1–2 (2005): 62–100, doi: 10.1163/1568529054573451.

For Greeks, the idea of ugly divinity was rather unnatural. Some early theologians responded to the problem by underlining the beauty in the ugly Jesus. This paradox is only apparent because they did not consider this beauty to be external but moral or spiritual. Clement of Alexandria reflects on this idea as follows:

> The Spirit gives witness through Isaiah that even the Lord became an unsightly spectacle: 'And we saw him, and there was no beauty or comeliness in him, but his form was despised and rejected by people.' Yet, who is better than the Lord? He displayed not beauty of the flesh, which is only outward appearance, but the true beauty of body and soul – for the soul, the beauty of good deeds; for the body, the beauty of immortality.[30]

And to already mentioned Celsus, pointing out the ugliness of the prophesied Christ, Origen answers:

> How did he fail to notice that his body differed in accordance with the capacity of those who saw it, and on this account appeared in such form as was beneficial for the needs of each individual's vision? … To those who are still down below and are not yet prepared to ascend, the Logos 'has not form nor beauty'. However, to those who by following him have received power to go after him even as he is ascending the high mountain, he has a more divine form.[31]

While such solutions are understandable in the context of the polemic of their time, it is clear that the swift theological move to 'the beauty of good deeds', 'the beauty of immortality', and 'divine form' leaves *physical* ugliness far behind. Beauty – even if it is the beauty of an ethical and theological nature – again overshadows the unembellished reality, namely that Jesus, seen through the lens of a suffering servant, had a repulsive appearance. The paradox, then, is that some early church writers rehabilitated the idea of Jesus' ugliness, though only to make it a platform for developing reflections on his beauty and thus marginalising ugliness all over again. Moreover, such a practice neglects the idea's comforting pastoral potential. This potential consists in the fact that people who are

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[30] Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator*, III,1.3. Cited from Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator* (FC 23; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 201.

[31] Origen, *Against Celsus*. VI,77. Cited from Chadwick, *Origen*, 390.

disfigured and marginalised can identify with the condition of Christ, who also had no form or beauty, his form was without honor, failing beyond all men. His face was turned away, he was dishonored and not esteemed. Many were astonished at him, his appearance was beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals.

Fig. 3: Hieronymus Bosch: *Christ Carrying the Cross*

Nevertheless, the pastorally utilised idea that the sight of a mocked Christ can bring comfort is not without its dangers. As liberation theology and feminist theology have pointed out, such an idea has also been misused to sanctify oppression. One was to be meek and obediently carry one's cross as Christ did, thus leaving oppressive social structures unchanged. As Leonardo Boff, one of the leading representatives of liberation theology, notes, the image of Christ's suffering on the cross can make the oppressed interiorise their powerlessness. Christ thus becomes a symbol of subjugation, not the one who incites liberation.[52]

The feminist point of view is well summarised by Czech theologian Jana Opočenská in her concise synthetic work on this current:

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[52] See Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 271. Cf. Rosino Gibellini, *La Teologia del XX secolo* (Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 1992), 394–395.

> Neutral texts can also be dangerous, i.e., they can be oppressive, if they are used to inculcate patriarchal principles and behaviour. If a woman plagued by a man's beatings is exhorted to carry her cross and suffer as Jesus suffered to save her marriage, then the neutral biblical motif (carrying one's own cross) is used to reinforce patriarchal values.[35]

However, we understand the ugliness we are discussing here primarily as a fate that can be dealt with internally but cannot be changed – unlike the discrimination associated with it – by external social and legal measures. That is why in this case, the danger pointed out by liberation theologians and feminists is much smaller, and the awareness that Christ was considered ugly can play a fruitful pastoral role. This role is based on the assumption that the burden of unattractiveness might be better borne by Christians if they look to this very Christ – not the beautiful and dazzling one, but the repulsive and disfigured one from whom many turn their eyes away.

In addition, the idea of the ugly Christ does involve not only this pastoral aspect but also a culturally critical and transformative dimension. The ideal of beauty, as presented to us in various social media, can lead not only to feelings of inferiority in those who do not meet this physical 'standard'. Its exaltation also implicitly suggests that it is one of the main values to orient our lives around, even a certain measure of the quality of a particular person. As Jay B. McDaniel critically notes, 'success and physical attractiveness are the twin gods of consumer culture'.[34] Of course, it is not that we want to question the phenomenon of physical beauty and its aesthetic significance. Rather, we want to draw attention to the fact that other values have a much more important role in the Christian tradition than this type of beauty. Those who admire, for example, Albert Schweitzer, Dorothy Day or any other figure who sought to give practical, ethical expression to his or her faith are usually not interested in their appearance but focus on their words and actions. In this respect, Clement of Alexandria's emphasis on the beauty of the works of Jesus is more than a pious cliché. For he shows that true humanity, of which Jesus was the model, is not related to outer attractiveness or ugliness but to actions. The countercultural

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[35] Jana Opočenská, *Zpovzdálí se dívaly také ženy* [Women Were Also Watching from Afar] (Praha: Kalich, 1995), 48.

[34] Jay B. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 13.

significance of this idea is obvious – while contemporary society places fitness and beauty on a pedestal, the image of the suffering and ugly servant is a subversive image that highlights other values.[35] This image also undermines the idea that aesthetic ugliness mirrors moral ugliness, the idea that has been used as propaganda to demonise certain groups of the population, as we have shown earlier.

Fig. 4: Albrecht Dürer, *The Witch*

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[35] See McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings*, 14: 'Attractiveness … is defined in an unchristian way. If we are Christian, we might like to define attractiveness as having the kind of magnetism that Jesus had: a drawing power that comes from humility, compassion for the marginalized of society, and a willingness to speak the truth regardless of the cost. But rootless consumerism does not define attractiveness this way. From its vantage point, the attractive person is one who is young and sexy or old but distinguished. Attractiveness means outer not inner beauty.'

If Jesus understood as an Isaiah-like suffering servant brings salvation, he brings it precisely as deformed, as ugly.[36] This is no docetic or spiritual speculation but a very much corporal – 'flesh and blood' – narrative in which ugliness has an essential role. As Augustine wrote, 'Christ's deformity is what gives form to you. If he had been unwilling to be deformed, you would never have got back the form you lost. So, he hung on the cross, deformed; but his deformity was our beauty.'[37]

However, if we understand salvation in its fullness, we cannot skip over the fact that salvation also brings comfort in the painful struggle with one's own ugliness and frees human beings from the social pressure to conform to the ideal of bodily beauty.

In his famous statement, Dostoevsky claimed that beauty would save the world, but in fact, it was ugliness that brought redemption and salvation to humanity. This by no means implies that Jesus brought salvation *because* he was ugly, that salvation is only for the ugly, or even that ugliness itself is a qualification for salvation. It is not our purpose to enter into a soteriological discussion. We merely intend to point out that ugliness cannot under any circumstances be degraded, dehumanised, or belittled. It is tied to Christ, who brings salvation to humanity precisely as an unsightly and deformed suffering servant. If we consider this, we could bring a little more acceptance, kindness, hope, and love into the world because we will help overcome the dangerous stereotypes that associate ugliness and disfigurement with moral distrust, danger, and fear.

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[36] See also the connection between ugliness and redemption in the concept of de Gruchy in Pavol Bargár, '"It felt it…it was perfect": Apollo, Dionysus, Christ, and Black Swan,' *Communio Viatorum* 60, no. 3 (2018), 313–333.

[37] Augustine, *Sermons* 27.6. Cited from Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of Saint Augustine. Part III – Sermons. Volume II: Sermons 20–50*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1990), 107.

HOW BEAUTY IS DYING

J I Ř Í   H A N U Š

ABSTRACT
In his essay, the author reflects on the death of 'beauty' within the context of the present state of nature (the phenomenon of the forest and its problems), modern art (the transformations within visual art) and language (the demise of dialects, the destruction of language by contemporary ideologies). The fact that 'beauty' is not merely a subjective category and is not purely a matter of individual taste means that we can rationally discuss its renewal (nature), the talent, craftsmanship and diligence involved (art), and the relationship between language ideas and thoughts (how 'nicely' we speak).

Keywords
Beauty; Nature; Art; Language

Let us start with the Greek myth about the beauty of Adonis. He had the misfortune of catching the eye of the goddess Aphrodite, who was not averse to including humans among her prey. When she spotted the handsome Adonis, a nineteen-year-old young man with a beard so soft that a kiss from him was supposedly poetry, then she was unable to resist him, and another Greek erotic affair began. But that was not all – through Aphrodite's carelessness, Adonis came to the attention of a fellow goddess, Persephone, the icy ruler of the underworld, who also fell for Adonis. In the end, Zeus decided that during the spring and summer the young man was to be with Aphrodite on earth, while the other six months would be spent in the 'service' of Persephone in the underworld. Ultimately, however, it was never about

his adventures as he died young while hunting a wild boar, and so we never discover if he enjoyed this journeying to and fro. In any case, the more likely interpretation is that it concerns the changing of the seasons, the alternation between life and death, and the constant cycle of life.[1] For the Greeks, there is an echo here of the fondness for beautiful young men, something which was to become immoral in the stricter Judeo-Christian environment. However, there are other aspects to the story of this man. Adonis is worn out by two femmes fatales. His beauty has to be divided; it is not and cannot be eternal, even if he is admired by goddesses. His beauty must die because it does not have an Olympian sheen: it is subject to the tragedy of this world, which is too dangerous for beauty to endure within it. Our world can only hold on to beauty for a short time, not forever; beauty changes – like happiness or health. Despite her efforts, not even the goddess Aphrodite is able to bring the hero back to life. The beauty of youth crumbles to dust. Here on earth, beauty passes quickly or slowly, expectedly or unexpectedly. Its transience should serve as a warning to those who set great store by it.

Of course, the transience of beauty does not mean that beauty cannot be a value that is 'sworn to', a value which, even in its fleetingness, might be placed above ethical or metaphysical values. Romanticism has had a huge influence on the modern era with its elevated appreciation of beauty, particularly in art and nature. This can be highlighted by at least three tendencies: the individualisation of the artist in the form of appreciating exceptional talent (the Romantic genius, people such as Goethe and Beethoven whose works connect Classicism and Romanticism); the loosening of Christian teachings in the form of different non-orthodox trends which not only brought about political radicalisation but also an alternative understanding of beauty; and finally in the Romantic 'discovery' of the people with their distinctive national cultural features, even though this discovery had a retroactive effect on artistic creation. In Romanticism, we can also see the origin of the 'art of the everyday' – a tendency towards a normal, common beauty, the beauty of ordinariness.[2] This sees the

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[1]   There is nice interpretation by Bedřich Fučík and Jindřich Pokorný in: Heslo 'Krásný jako Adonis,' in *Zakopaný pes aneb o tom, jak, proč a kde vznikla některá slova, jména, rčení, úsloví, pořekadla a přísloví* (Prague: Albatros, 2001), 122–124.

[2]   Cf. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales. Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

beginnings of the modernist clash between the old and the new, which in the nineteenth century, but especially in the twentieth century, not only resulted in disputes concerning the avant-garde in art but also the definitive severance of artistic values from the values of perfection in craftwork, together with the emergence of the 'everyday' and 'ugliness' in the world of art.

In this essay, I shall attempt to discuss three ways in which beauty is dying. First, we shall consider the demise of nature as a type of 'creation', the fate of which lies to a great extent in the hands of man. Here, I shall draw inspiration from the works of Václav Cílek and his colleagues. Then we shall consider beauty in works of art, referring to the ideas of Sir Roger Scruton – a renaissance figure who covered several disciplines, including aesthetics. And at the end, we will devote a few lines to the beauty of language as both a means of communication as well as a form of expression which follows us from the cradle to the grave as our mother tongue and is inextricably linked to our thinking and enables us to be human. For this third point, we will refer to a neglected work by the essayist Petr Fidelius.

1. How Nature is Dying

Unfortunately, various climatic and other natural disasters appear to be a fixed part of our lives now. I have experienced this first-hand during my regular visits to the forests of the Drahan Highlands in Moravia. Over the past few years, a large area of forest from Boskovice to Protivanov and the surrounding area has been destroyed by bark beetles and other factors. This has resulted in large, new clearings, with logging at a much greater scale. Even the layperson cannot ignore the changes to the environment which affect their everyday lives. When faced by these changes, it is possible to offer a few preliminary remarks about the environment as well as our desire to 'save' beauty at all costs.

Nature is undoubtedly beautiful, but there has to be one important precondition – from mankind's perspective, it has to be under control. And so the apple tree in our own garden is beautiful as it grows, blossoms, and bears fruit. This beauty is somewhat diminished if we look into 'nature's kitchen' and recognise the Darwinian environment in which nature operates. Here the struggle for life is incredibly hard compared with the human world, and its possible (though not always applied) recourse through reason and the awareness of community

and empathy. Although nature is incapable of the 'dehumanisation' which we observe in people during times of war, consciousness, which again features today in scientific studies, still creates a differential basis to which can be added other distinctions between human, animal, and natural phenomena. This element has a rich intellectual tradition. Beauty will entirely disappear if mankind loses control over nature – some telling current examples are the Australian forest fires, the spread of African locusts, and the coronavirus. A lack of control can certainly be caused by inadvertent human intervention or systemic faults (climate change caused by humans), but that does not change the fact that nature out of control is dangerous for humans and not only causes problems but also diminishes its beauty for us. The idea of a summer fire beside a cottage with romantic evening hues and a star-studded sky is an idyllic vision, unlike a burning forest.[3]

The reality of 'control' is undoubtedly connected to issues of power and the old-fashioned mastery of nature. In the modern era, expressions such as power and mastery have been replaced by the word care.[4] However, this change has not really altered the essence of the matter, even if the word 'care' sounds more altruistic and less exploitative. Care can also have its imperfections (misplaced, untrained, excessive care), not to mention that it is through care that we express our power over the 'cared one' as well as a certain protective role. Therefore, among other things, beauty also depends on a level of care. This is shown very aptly in the natural landscape of the forest.

A forest is a complex natural formation that has been much discussed over recent decades in connection with the soil and water, but also in relation to its aesthetic and even therapeutic qualities.[5] It is an

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[3] By coincidence, I am writing this as part of the area known as Bohemian Switzerland is in flames. Such forest fires are very rare in the Czech Republic and are more reminiscent of the summer fires in southern countries such as Greece.

[4] Modern concerns about the use of the word 'power' and the attempts to replace it strike me as somewhat infantile. If we understand power to mean responsibility and competency, as the Canadian clinical psychologist and 'media celebrity' Jordan Peterson writes in his books and lectures, then any concerns about 'power' equating solely with 'superiority' are misplaced.

[5] Here, we are referring to a comprehensive publication by Václav Cílek, Martin Polívka, and Zdeněk Vacek, *Český a moravský les. Jeho počátky, současný stav a výhled do budoucnosti* (Praha: Dokořán, 2022), which also features other specialists. Here, Václav Kinský discussed the 'beauty of the forest': he reflects on forest management, on the beauty, picturesqueness and majesty of works by important painters and writers who have been inspired by this phenomenon. The main contribution of his study is the 'aesthetic of managed forests' (pp. 363–375).

incredible natural phenomenon, the development of which corresponds to approximately one human lifespan – a phenomenon which represents the symbiosis of trees, their root systems, fungi, plants, and animals. From an ecological perspective, there is currently a debate surrounding the issue of spruce and pine trees – i.e. the 'monocultures' which, since the time of the Enlightenment, have been introduced into the Czech lands for practical reasons. However, this does not mean that spruce forests, for example, are not beautiful. As we have become used to them, we can wander safely in them; we can find mushrooms and shade there as well as peace and quiet. It has been shown that the future lies not in the removal of spruce forests but in having a greater plurality of trees, so-called mixed forests, which certainly also have their own magic (moreover, they reflect the older, pre-Enlightenment image of the Czech landscape) and will evidently be more resilient in the future. In terms of harmony and beauty, they represent a greater variety and can be happily admired hour after hour.

Let us pause for a moment at this characteristic of 'natural beauty'. Unlike manmade artistic creations, there is no limit to our admiration of natural formations due to their character, colourfulness, and mutability. Certainly, there are natural formations where this is not the case, such as deserts, which can fascinate us for a shorter time but which lack the features we can observe in nature in Central Europe with its seasonal cycles. Mankind has a natural evolutionary proximity to nature, even if there are some people who do not necessarily feel it. They might not go into the garden or forest, but they will at least have imitation wooden worktops fitted in the kitchen.

Natural beauty is dying out around us, even if it is very difficult for us to decide the extent to which this is due to direct human intervention or more profound changes; the causes and effects of this phenomenon are more difficult to study while finding ways to improve the existing situation is equally problematic. There is a human intervention which almost immediately can be seen as being wrongheaded. This includes systemic intervention against nature as a result of ideology (the crass changes to land systems brought about by unifying fields under state socialism accompanied by the liquidation of the peasantry[6]), priori-

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[6]   Here, I feel the need to emphasise the relationship between the liquidation of nature and a social class, which was the catastrophic result of the communists' attempt to create a total society, which the Third Republic unfortunately also had a role in. Cf. Karel Jech, *Soumrak selského stavu 1945-1960* (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 2001).

tising purely practical aspects (the short-sighted and ill-considered felling of forests in the pursuit of profit), the challenge of improving management (while it is possible to find Czech workers for logging, it is more difficult when it comes to the plantation and maintenance of forests), marginalising modern scientific research, and so on. There is, of course, another extreme which places nature on a spiritual level. According to some social groups, which resemble religious sects, nature has transformed into an 'overtly' alive super-being with cognitive or even supernatural abilities which influence human life. For some people, the entire Earth is the old Greek Goddess Gaia, though shorn of the typical Greek parameters. It would seem to be a new kind of paganism, containing the illusion of the 'goodness' of nature which has been corrupted by mankind's pride and greed. The Greek inspiration lies in the idea of a future harmony when mankind not only starts to treat nature with respect but accords it rights which are almost equal to those of mankind. Although modern neo-paganism takes on different forms, including ahistorical imitations of pagan rituals (Slavonic and Celtic), it would appear to be more a radical offshoot of Romanticism and therefore an expression of modernism. This can be seen in this social group's critical attitude towards Christian and Judeo-Christian values in general. The radical nature of neo-paganism can even manifest itself in a rejection of the existence of mankind on Earth through the rejection of *proles* (offspring). Beauty is reduced to the beauty of nature without mankind. This is not even a scientifically sustainable argument, as mankind is part of nature, even if we are separated from it by certain specific features.

In Christian literature, 'paganism' is transformed into a narrative in which nature may have been anthropomorphised but is eventually involved in God's story with humans, or – if it becomes enraged – it is ultimately subordinated to the 'king of all gods', i.e. to Christ. While we are talking about the example of the forest, it is nice to see in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954–1955) the old forest full of living creatures which itself becomes alive. For a while, it appears that it will not join in the struggle against the evil which threatens the whole of Middle Earth, but it finally intervenes decisively in the fight against the wizard Saruman. Although Tolkien's stories are full of mythology (Tolkien's knowledge was second to none when it came to Beowulf and other European pagan sagas!), it could be said that the author largely constructs them, while nature is skilfully woven into the parables of

human stories which have a metaphysical aspect. Naturally, this example is no longer about reality but the 'depiction of reality'[7] and does not fall into the category of nature dying and reviving but how it is conceived in literature.

2. How Art is Dying

As a human creation, art is essentially different to nature, even though there can be no doubt that it is also present in a primitive way amongst animals (there are birds which decorate their nests) and that it is impossible to place an insurmountable barrier between the two – aesthetic categories enable us to view and evaluate both worlds and consider their differences.

   According to the British philosopher, aesthetician, and political scientist Roger Scruton (1944–2020), art is a space for the human imagination. Creations can then inhabit their own world, unlike the creations of the imagination, which seek a 'simulacrum' or an image from which 'all veils of hesitation have been torn away' and from which no distance is possible.[8] Integral to the imagination are convention, framing, and restraint. This differentiation enables us to judge the value of such works of art which are based on fantasy, such as films. Scruton made this point when he analysed Bergman's film *Wild Strawberries*. The Swedish filmmaker eschewed the use of colour, and his work 'illustrates the distinction between aesthetic interest and mere effect: the first creating a distance that the second destroys.'[9]

   The conservative-minded Scruton then goes on to consider concepts such as the significance of the work, representation, and expression. The expression here is fundamental as it operates with unmistakable structures and thus creates the work's uniqueness. For example, we could paraphrase Shakespeare's line 'to be or not to be' as 'to exist or not to exist; there's the problem', but the specifically chosen word already has its meaning in a given tradition with its existential angst and corresponding doctrine of 'contingent being'.[10] The difference

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[7]   Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: A. Francke, 1946).
[8]   Roger Scruton, *Krása. Velmi stručný úvod* [Beauty: A Very Short Introduction] (Praha: Oikúmené, 2021), 90.
[9]   Ibid, 89.
[10] Ibid, 96.

between good and bad art lies in the difference between representation and expression (most B movies are quite good representations of absurd situations that draw people into their world without having any artistic purpose).

Art, of course, is dying out in thousands of different ways. We should not forget about the destruction of artworks in old and modern iconoclasm,[11] in the field of ideological hatred towards artworks, and in the sphere of war rampaging against cultural and educational institutions (as can be seen in Ukraine today). For the Czech (Czechoslovak) memory and memory institutions, it should be obligatory not only to remember but also to analyse the harsh as well as subtle ways in which the Communist Party persecuted artists who wanted to express themselves freely. Nor should we forget the system of censorship and self-censorship, the different forms of harassment, the various systems of permission, protectionism, favouritism towards artists who were 'party loyalists'. However, there was a significant paradox for the period of Normalisation after 1969: despite all of the restrictions, high-quality independent art was still being made, often thanks to the bravery and persistence of people who wanted to devote their lives to culture.

Scruton's differentiation also shows us another internal aspect of the demise of art – 'dying from within'. Modern art in particular is based more on emotions and representation while marginalising conventions and craftsmanship. Modernism is tainted by its interest in gestures, its ability to provoke and to shock, a tendency towards irony, casting off traditions and taboos, removing the appropriate distance, and originality at all costs. One wonders if these features of modern art, in particular visual art, do not cause a kind of 'emptiness' or abandonment of form, which, in the majority of cases, represents the basis of each creation. This is well illustrated in an abstract art form, such as music rather than visual art. Naturally, new musical forms can emerge, but the interpreters and composers are much more in the thrall of and 'determined' by musical traditions, conventions, and above all, skills.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, these remarks are not aimed against modern art as such or against the changes which have to accompany all creative endeavours. However, in visual art in particular, it is

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[11] Cf. Alain Besançon, *L'Image interdite. Une histoire intellectuelle de l'iconoclasme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000). Besançon relates iconoclasm to the modern art of the 19th century (France, England), and then especially to Russian abstract art (Kandinsky, Malevich).

possible to observe the above tendencies, which require some reflection. For example, it is impossible to ignore the disputes which surface with specific exhibition practices as part of discussions on postmodern art and its evaluation, which is related to the institutions and the entire community which have decision-making powers. Here it is possible to observe radical stances and disputes which reveal the shifting criteria for the quality of a work of art. Incidentally, it is not only possible to talk about the demise of art within the context of conflicts about how it is possible to exhibit and support art – if these disputes reach a certain level, they could prevent the support of any kind of art, thereby 'killing' it.

It is intriguing that sculpture often finds itself the subject of passionate disputes. The sculpture is long-lasting by its very nature and is often set within a historical context which provokes social polarisation. Before it had even been installed, Jaroslav Róna's sculpture of Margrave Jobst on a horse had already raised controversy – and this was a fairly uncontentious historical character.[12] It is even more difficult for those wishing to depict a more modern theme or figure. Often the artists have to confront 'popular anger' on social media, even though they have fulfilled all the democratic requirements for agreeing and financing the sculpture in public spaces.

3. How Language is Dying

It is evident that language is not merely a means for understanding and communicating, even if these are its primary functions. It is also a way of symbolically organising the world and experiencing it. As Jan Sokol wrote: 'It is not (…) just an instrument, because it also subtly guides and leads us, determining what can become an experience and in what form.'[15] According to Georg Gadamer, who, incidentally, Sokol also quotes, human language is characterised by the fact that we usually do not notice it (so-called self-forgetfulness), that it addresses itself to others (the realm of the 'we', the building of a community) and

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[12] Even for the critics of the work, I would recommend watching a CD called *Odvaha/ Courage*, a documentary by Pavel Štingl about the making of Jaroslav Róna's sculpture. Even the most obstinate opponents of the work come face to face with the tough, gruelling, and long-lasting work of a sculptor who deserves admiration. K2 and Czech Television, 2016.

[15] Jan Sokol, *Člověk jako osoba. Filosofická antropologie* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2016).

is thus universal (it is not tied to what is present). (Cf. Gadamer, *Man and Language*).

Language, therefore, has profound cultural significance. 'A person who knows how to narrate or write well can conjure up a rich whole "world" in a few words, because they skilfully build on how the listener has constructed their own world. The words and sentences of the narrative are then supplemented by the listener's own experience, which can be incredibly rich and colourful.'[14]

Language and speech[15] is therefore of key importance in human life, but at the same time, it is also fragile, vulnerable and exploitable. It greatly depends on who taught us our mother tongue, how we mastered it, and how many other languages we have learned. Our language can be very primitive and can fail in its primary functions, which we are well aware of when we try to speak a foreign language. Language and the 'ability to speak' is a matter of talent but also of education and upbringing. Someone's language might be beautiful but also 'cluttered' with unsuitable expressions, it might be rich but overly complicated, it might be burdened with disorganised phrases, linguistic ballast and repetition. It is not at all surprising that we often talk about a misunderstanding which results from the fact that when people discuss something, they need not only the right linguistic tools but also a certain 'congruency of ideas'.

Historically speaking, specific languages have been dying out since the time of the Enlightenment as a result of centralisation and the idea that a 'national language' was necessary. This especially applied to dialects which no longer served the supposed nationwide interest. A typical example is the centralisation of the French language during the French Revolution, which is a good example of language centralisation, standardisation, and state requirements (the unified command of the 'national' army). Naturally, this did not apply only to France but also to other countries which provided a primary school education and therefore unified schooling. With the spread of literacy, the need for standardised forms of languages rose proportionally. The French example of the fight against the 'patois', featuring the famous bishop Abbé Grégoire, was later copied by other European countries,

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[14] Ibid, 85.
[15] Here, we are not distinguishing language and speech as was suggested by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857– 1913), the Swiss structuralist, who examined language as a system and speech as its concrete form.

while something similar also happened in the New World (USA, Peru, Brazil).[16]

Language is also always threatened on a personal level by unrefined usage. On the other hand, its universality and social necessity are always going to be overseen by society and politics. I remember how I was influenced by Petr Fidelius's book *Jazyk a moc*[17] (Language and Power) when I was a university student. In this brilliant study, the author gave a detailed analysis of the 'language' of Rudé právo, the then-official newspaper of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The author took the language of communist propaganda seriously as he was aware that we could end up part of their game precisely if we underestimated it. It was not difficult for Fidelius to wade through the turgid sections of the unwieldy introductions, deformed in terms of ideas and language, and used 'detailed detective-like' research to extract from them the illogical structure of communist new-speak and the ideas which were hidden behind the language. He correctly and humorously uncovered the 'fairy-tale' basis of communist ideology, built on the remarkable symbol of the 'working people', on famous, albeit flawed heroes (Stalin), on untouchable institutions (the party), and finally on the ever-present enemies who threaten the 'kingdom of goodness' from within and without. Naturally, Fidelius also knew that language and its aesthetic functions could also be destroyed by non-communist 'gobbledegook', in particular by the 'semantic inflation', which can affect democratic as well as totalitarian regimes.

We are convinced of how a language can be beautiful thanks to our mother tongue, as we learned it 'from the inside out' as it were, and we have the greatest level of sensitivity towards it. The beauty of a language does not depend on using some kind of flowery speech, though nor does it mean resorting to a kind of linguistic purism. However, it is possible to recognise and objectively assess if someone's Czech (or any other language) 'has been elevated to a noble level', as the poet Jan Zahradníček wrote about another Czech poet, Josef Václav Sládek. The current position on language is more or less based on utility, even if there is greater urgency to distinguish between information and disinformation and between the truth, half-truths, and lies. The fact is that language 'betrays' us and tells us more about ourselves than we imagine – in particular, when we

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[16] Cf. Peter Burke, *Jazyky a společenství v raně novověké Evropě* (Prague: NLN, 2004), 145–146.

[17] Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc* (Mnichov: Arkýř, 1983). The author, whose real name is Karel Palek (1948), is a university lecturer, philologist, and translator.

describe a situation inadequately and try to dominate the terrain we are operating in linguistically by using superfluous terminology; when we use platitudes; or when we use phrases that are borrowed unnecessarily from other languages when we could use our own. Language is a good servant, but only if we care for it and avoid abusing it. The Psalmist expresses the connection between the 'heart' and language thus:

> Your tongue plots destruction,
> it's like a sharpened razor,
> You love evil rather than good,
> falsehood rather than speaking the truth,
> You love every harmful word,
> you deceitful tongue![18]

These should be warning words for us: in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which we are a part of whether we are conscious of it or not, there is a quite clear connection between the 'internal' state of our being and language. If someone is deceitful (a word which often appears in the Bible), it is apparent when they open their mouth. If we are dying internally, this is also manifested outwardly.

In Conclusion

Beauty is like a species of animal which is under threat. New ones may be created, but at the same time, they are dying out 'in droves' or may die out with our direct assistance. This is true and entirely obvious with something you can count – like whales. If their numbers are dwindling, then that makes them an endangered species. It is much more difficult to quantify beauty. Beauty is elusive, sensitive, and sometimes difficult to recognise amongst the rubble – in such cases, we should not abandon classical personifications. Beauty can also disappear if we refuse to understand it based on rational knowledge. It disappears when those without talent interfere in the craft of the talented. It can be destroyed by ideologies of all kinds. Villains often veil themselves in beautiful disguises and words. Occasionally, despite its morbid state, it will blossom where we least expect it. Beauty is certainly ephemeral, as was indicated by the introductory story of Adonis;

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[18]   Psalm 52, 4–6.

moreover, it acquires different forms. It dies, but then it is reborn. And it does not only have to be from Apollonian or Dionysian traditions;[19] it lives in every age and does not avoid simple dwellings.

In slightly less figurative terms, as the modern age is basically an ambivalent age, we hear more about the 'search' for beauty rather than 'finding' it. This search is connected to the three important tendencies we mentioned and which form the background to specific examples. The first tendency is linked to the phenomenon of revolution and is also related to old forms of destroying allegedly outdated or 'enemy' values – these are forms of destroying artistic monuments, i.e. forms of iconoclasm. This often has a political context in the form of radical political movements which are opposed to the symbols of the alleged enemy. The second tendency is a form of destroying beauty 'from within', which is connected to a modern form of subjectivity that does not accept traditional concepts for evaluating beauty which contain evaluative criteria. The third tendency is the understanding of beauty as a value which is dependent on human creativity, which in a Christian environment might appear as the discovery of basic Christian symbolism, shorn of complex (kitsch) layers[20], in a society-wide search for alternative forms of art, but also in the appreciation of natural beauties which are reliant on human influences (the diverse character of the environmental movement).

There is a certain subjective element to the evaluation of beauty involving personal preferences and interests, and to a certain extent, it is indeed a matter of taste. Alongside this, however, is the search for beauty using rational criteria, which allow us not only to talk about beauty and evaluate it within certain aesthetic categories but also to describe its condition and consider any necessary redress.

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[19] We are not doubting Friedrich Nietzsche's brilliant contribution (*The Birth of Tragedy: From the Spirit of Music*). We are simply suggesting that the Christian tradition also has an undoubted and perhaps even more easily documented influence on modern art – and its own understanding of the tragedy of life which Nietzsche rejected.

[20] Typical in this respect is the work with Christian symbols in the ecumenical community in Taizé in France, for whom it is important to have a monastic life freed from complexity in the form of simple chants in modest church surroundings.

AND BEAUTY WILL MAKE YOU FREE:
ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF BEAUTY*

PAVOL BARGÁR

ABSTRACT

In allusion to the famous Johannine dictum, this paper seeks to explore the relationship between beauty and liberation. Liberation is here understood in terms of a movement toward transforming all reality in accordance with the principles of the coming reign of God, 'so that God may be all in all' (1 Cor 15:28). Complementarily, beauty is not interpreted merely as a matter of taste and preference but as something that permeates all dimensions of being human. The paper, therefore, argues that beauty not only gives expression to the human yearning for transformation but that both beauty and liberation represent the constitutive elements of Christian praxis. Thus, beauty provides a framework through which the current reality can not only be seen but also discerned, experienced, and performed in a new way, thus effectively opening up possibilities for transformation as God's project of inaugurating a new heaven and a new earth. Therefore, it will be proposed that beauty represents a key theme for theological reflection (*locus theologicus*), having aesthetic, ethical, and ontological implications for Christian theology. This point will not only be discussed in conversation with various theological voices but also illustrated through engagement with cinema, namely, Jane Campion's *The Power of the Dog*.

Keywords

Aesthetics; Beauty; Christianity; Imagination; Liberation; Praxis, *The Power of the Dog* (film); Transformation

The theme of this paper is beauty and liberation. I would like to argue that our human yearning for beauty seeks to be united with our desire for liberation in the human pursuit of – in the language of biblical imagery – a new heaven and a new earth. Whether inadvertently or deliberately, we as human beings perceive the ugliness of that which should not be here: the ugliness of injustice, discrimination, poverty, marginalisation, disenfranchisement, apathy, and unconcern. In a word, to use a theological shortcut, the ugliness of sin. We feel and often even strive to fathom that such ugliness has no place in God's good and beautiful creation. However, there is yet another quality involved in the relationship between God and creation, namely, truth. In Hebrew, truth (*emet*) refers to firmness, faithfulness, and stability. This stability, it is important to say, does not evoke a static structure. Rather, it implies reliability and desirability. In that sense, truth, in biblical understanding, indicates how 'things should be', both presently and eschatologically. From this perspective, again, the ugliness of sin signifies a tear in the fabric of creation.

The 'echoes' of the goodness, truth, and beauty of God's creation shine through the biblical account in Genesis 1, which enables the readers to exercise their imagination while making their way through the carefully structured text that introduces creation as a jewel of unmeasurable worth. Extending the narrative arc to the following book in the biblical canon, however, Exodus 1 makes us painfully aware of the plight of the people of Israel and its longing for liberation. The scriptural narrative is thus framed by (the marvelling at the) beauty (of God's creation) and (the seeking of) liberation (from oppression). Therefore, our quest for liberation is at the same time a quest for beauty. Yet, as both Genesis 1:28 and Exodus 3:8 suggest, this liberation-beauty nexus is not to be interpreted as static, as a mere return to the original state of things. To the contrary, for the purposes of this paper, liberation will be understood in terms of a movement toward transforming all reality in accordance with the principles of the coming reign of God, 'so that God may be all in all' (1 Cor 15:28). The latter quotation comes from the passage in which the apostle contemplates the resurrection of the dead and the age to come. Central to his argument is Christ, who liberates humankind from the power of death in order to inaugurate God's plan for the consummation of creation. It is about imagining, empowered by the Spirit, how things should be ontologically, ethically,

and aesthetically; it is an imagination for what can be approximated by the metaphor of *basileia tou theou* in which vision and praxis are united.[1]

I have already made a remark regarding the truth as an important aspect of God's creation and its consummation. To elaborate on this line of thought further, John has in the fourth gospel Jesus say to his Jewish interlocutors who have believed in him that they would know the truth, and the truth would make them free (John 8:32). The context to which this word is written is that of a small Johannine community that feels isolated in a hostile world. 'Envisioning itself as a light in the darkness', the community finds in the gospel reassurance that God is with them, loving them and providing them with a sense of belonging.[2] For the Johannine community, however, such imagining is not mere escapism nor a way to deal with their opponents. Importantly, it becomes for them a source of hope and a driver of change. The truth will make you free.

To pursue the main theme of the present paper while following this logic, Willie James Jennings calibrates our view on beauty as an aspect related to human liberation. More specifically, Jennings explores beauty as mediated through art. It is art, he maintains, that gives expression to the depths of human life and divine life. When 'giving voice to the depths', moreover, the artistic is bound to the prophetic in the process that Jennings refers to as 'the Spirit of God working on and through bodies'.[3] For both individuals and communities to realise and nourish a shared life in fullness and freedom, the artistic and the prophetic must join in synergy.[4] This dynamic, then, involves much more than simply 'giving expression'; rather, it brings beauty and liberation together through the category of performance, or praxis, as I will suggest below. Once again, engaging the category of truth alongside beauty in search of liberation, as Jennings says, '[i]t is essentially the performance of

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1   Antonio Sison helpfully explains that the New Testament term *basileia tou theou* implies two dimensions, the kingdom of God and the reign of God as 'two sides of the same coin'. While 'the kingdom emphasizes the vision, the reign emphasizes the praxis'. See Antonio D. Sison, C.PP.S., 'Reign-Focus: Theology, Film, and the Aesthetics of Liberation,' *New Theology Review* 24, no. 3 (2011): 42–52, 45.

2   See Robert E. Goss, 'John,' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 548–65, 550.

3   Willie James Jennings, 'Embodying the Artistic Spirit and the Prophetic Arts,' *Literature & Theology* 30, no. 3 (2016): 256–64, 257, doi:10.1093/litthe/frw022.

4   See Jennings, 'Embodying,' 256.

the truth that could become a truth that sets us free and leads to emancipatory action. The artistic joined to the prophetic could set us free.'[5] For a theology passionate about discerning God's work of transformation and becoming involved in liberating praxis, beauty, therefore, represents a major *locus theologicus*. Such a transformation-focused theology is not only instrumental for a transformation-driven Christian praxis but also helpful for reflecting on culture, as will become apparent from my engagement with cinema later in the paper. In fact, I maintain that theological attentiveness to both praxis and culture can helpfully go hand in hand to nurture a full-fledged Christian identity. Let us, therefore, explore some key features of beauty as a *locus theologicus*.

1. Beauty as a *Locus Theologicus*

When pondering on beauty from a theological perspective, one can hardly avoid considering the contribution Hans Urs von Balthasar made in this field. Rooted in the concepts of form and splendour (or glory), Balthasar's project of theological aesthetics addresses two main themes: revelation (i.e., how God discloses Godself and can be perceived by human beings) and human participation in the divine life.[6] Roberto Goizueta explains that, for Balthasar, God is '"the Beautiful" and, as such, can be known only insofar as we surrender ourselves to its intrinsic power, a power utterly gratuitous and beyond our control'.[7] Balthasar himself, therefore, understands 'aesthetics' as 'something properly theological, namely, as the reception, perceived with the eyes of faith, of the self-interpreting glory of the sovereignly free love of God.'[8] Christian existence, then, is seen as one of surrender to the Beautiful, with awe, worship, and discipleship being the appropriate response to the invitation by the loving God. For Balthasar, the Christian faith is of aesthetic nature.[9]

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[5] Jennings, 'Embodying,' 257.
[6] See Davide Zordan and Stefanie Knauss, 'Following the Traces of God in Art: Aesthetic Theology as Foundational Theology. An Introduction,' *CrossCurrents* 63, no. 1 (2013): 4–8, especially at 4–5.
[7] Roberto S. Goizueta, 'Theo-Drama as Liberative Praxis,' *CrossCurrents* 63, no. 1 (2013): 62–76, 63.
[8] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco, CA: St. Ignatius Press, 2004), 11.
[9] See Goizueta, 'Theo-Drama,' 67.

As we can see, from a theological perspective, beauty is not merely a matter of taste and preference. On the contrary, it permeates all dimensions of being human. Through our experience of beauty, a sense of wonder is awakened. Such an awakened sense of wonder makes possible not only an 'aesthetic existence' but also transformation. For Christians, this process ideally finds its expression in the worship and witness of the church vis-à-vis 'the life of the world'.[10]

Furthermore, this sense of wonder, in turn, leads to desire: a desire for wholeness, for transcendence, for God. In this sense, Rubem Alves refers to the human desires that are beautiful as 'fragments of the image of God'.[11] It is in the beauty that one can find the fragments of the divine.[12] Willie Jennings wisely reminds us that the starting point for the human condition is fragment rather than tradition and complete story. There is no whole here, 'everything is in slices and slivers, pieces and shards.'[13] Working through our fragmentation, we strive to overcome ugliness, alienation, and objectification (commodification) and to attain beauty, relationality, and belonging.[14] The very fact of such fragmentation highlights the tension between human brokenness and the desire for wholeness. This tension is to be understood in terms of liminality where 'uncertainty, fear and trembling for the unknown' is confronted by 'the discovery of new horizons, new meaning, new circumstances and a better future'.[15] In search of a life made free,

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[10] See John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.

[11] See Rubem Alves, 'An Invitation to Dream,' *The Ecumenical Review* 39 (1987): 59–62. Alves is quoted in Raimundo C. Barreto, 'The Prophet and the Poet: Richard Shaull and the Shaping of Rubem Alves's Liberative Theopoetics,' *Religions* 12, no. 251 (2021): 1–14, 11, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12040251.

[12] For more on this point see Rubem Alves, 'Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation,' in *Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension*, ed. Lorine M. Getz and Ruy O. Costa (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

[13] Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 32.

[14] Jennings himself distinguishes three kinds of fragments: fragments of faith (which we use to attune our senses to God's presence), colonial fragments (which continue to shatter and plague our worlds), and commodity fragments (which negatively impact our view of relationality). As he argues, 'fragments of faith can help us work with the colonial fragments and help us overcome the effects of the process that constantly creates the commodity fragment. We are fragment workers aiming at patterns of belonging.' See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 17.

[15] Gordon E. Dames, 'Biblical Vistas of Brokenness and Wholeness in a Time such as the Coronavirus Pandemic,' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020): 1–12, 3, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6160.

fragments are revivified by grace in 'the processes of being created as a complete whole'.[16] Here, wholeness implies integrity and meaning. Since it is truly liberating, wholeness is, in this reading, not experienced as totalising but rather as divine and beautiful.

Truly, in beauty one encounters the divine. In particular, one is drawn into the whirlpool of creation, relying on the Spirit for discernment to affirm all that is good in the world and to clearly identify that which is in need of critique and/or transformation. This process of discernment and action seeks to emphasise the sacramentality of the human experience of beauty.[17] In his interpretation of theological aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Gordon Lynch similarly opines that our experiences of beauty have 'a sacramental function in alerting us not only to the beauty of the object we experience but in pointing us beyond this object to the truth and goodness of God which is the ultimate source of all beauty.'[18] Theologians reflecting on beauty, then, essentially need to face a two-fold task: to account for the ways in which people relate to the beauty of God's coming into the world (i.e., revelation) and to interpret how God, in this process, presents truth, goodness, and beauty to us, thus inviting and making space for human participation in their 'production'. However, it is important to note that truth, goodness, and beauty do not emerge here as mere theoretical concepts. Furthermore, they are neither purely objective nor subjective. Rather, their birthplace, from a theological perspective, is to be found in the human experience of faith from which they arise as an embodied practice – or, as we will see below, praxis.[19] Herein also lies the core of Goizueta's critique of Balthasar's theological-aesthetic project. Goizueta argues that Balthasar, in his pursuit of the aesthetic, neglects the sociopolitical as he fails to appreciate the embodied experience, the lived faith (of the poor in particular). Instead, Goizueta proposes his own vision for a theological aesthetics of liberation that

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[16] Dames, 'Biblical Vistas,' 4. See also Johan Cilliers, 'Between Fragments and Fullness: Worshipping in the In-Between Spaces of Africa,' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (2013): 1–6, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i2.1296.

[17] See Stefanie Knauss, 'Sensing the Other and Divine in Embodied Experiences,' *Concilium* 1 (2018): 93–100, 95.

[18] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 185. Lynch refers to Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Behold the Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 1, Seeing the Form* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 118.

[19] See Zordan and Knauss, 'Following,' 6.

'resists both the reduction of liberation to sociopolitical praxis and the reduction of theological aesthetics to an apolitical, merely affective experience of the Beautiful.'[20] Keeping this close connection between beauty and liberation, we will now try to sketch the outlines of what I refer to as 'transformative praxis'.

2. Beauty and Liberation: Toward a Transformative Praxis

First of all, however, it is good to realise that at this point, we are already touching upon the epistemological significance of beauty. In short, beauty is part and parcel of the process in which we produce knowledge and make sense of, relate to, and participate in the transformation of the world.[21] The notion of culture represents a useful framework to situate this discussion. Robert Schreiter determines three major areas for the human construction and appropriation of culture. First, culture plays an ideological role. It stands for an embodiment of values, beliefs, and attitudes that provide necessary frames of reference for people to interpret the world and offer them guidance for living in the world. As such, culture is related to meaning production; it is through the culture that people make sense of their lives. Second, culture is associated with a performative role; through ritualised action, it binds people together and gives them participatory ways to embody and enact their shared stories and values. And third, culture has an artistic-symbolic dimension because various cultural artefacts, both material (e.g., food or clothing) and immaterial (e.g., music or language) in nature, have the potential to become a source of identity as well as engender transformation.[22] To appropriately reflect on and respond to culture – and, to be sure, beauty – Zordan and Knauss suggest that theology must become

> a foundational theology that is not looking for 'proofs' of God's existence in art or culture, but rather that is open to discover the 'traces' of a God who has always already passed, traces that can be found in all spheres of human

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[20] Goizueta, 'Theo-Drama,' 62.
[21] See Knauss, 'Sensing,' 95. See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 137 and Michelle Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 50.
[22] See Robert J. Schreiter, 'Communication and Interpretation across Cultures: Problems and Prospects,' *International Review of Mission* 85, no. 337 (1996): 227–39, especially at 230.

existence and experience. And in order to become a partner in a dialogue that is truly constructive for both sides, aesthetics will have to redefine its own specificities: for one, as a theory of *aisthesis*, of sensory perception, so as not to fall back into a mere philosophy of art; also as a reflection of the dimension of practice, in the sense of production and reception; and finally, as a new evaluation of the pure materiality of the work.[23]

In a similar vein, Goizueta employs the term 'the aesthetic character of Christian truth' when he refers to its power to draw people to the gospel message, to inspire and to transform groupings of terrified individuals into interdependent agents of new creation.[24]

The kind of epistemology that I am talking about here is not one of theoretical, intellectual cognition of truth. It evokes what is in liberationist theologies referred to as 'praxis', that is, a knowledge based on the continuous interplay between action and reflection on that action. Its origins can be traced back to the prophetic tradition in the Scriptures that emphasises 'orthopraxy' (or right acting) and not only 'orthodoxy' (or right thinking or right worship).[25] Revelation, in the view of praxis, is then 'a presence of God in the world that beckons to those who believe to join God's liberating and saving activity within the weave of human and cosmic history.'[26] Since 'to believe is to be drawn into and surrender to the Beautiful', the meaning of Christian faith is 'revealed in praxis, in our interaction with creation, other persons, and God'.[27] The human mind as well as the heart and the body are dimensions of praxis and as such mediate God's presence in and interaction with the world, both in its brokenness and beauty. In particular, the poor, the 'crucified people', represent an 'inverted mirror', a useful

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[23] Zordan and Knauss, 'Following,' 6, italics in the original. For a further discussion on the important concept of *aisthesis* see below.

[24] See Goizueta, 'Theo-Drama,' 64.

[25] Consider, for instance, the following words from Micah 6:7a-8 (NRSV):
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
(…)
He has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?

[26] Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, 'Contextual Methods in Theology,' in *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2018), 1–29, 17. Lynch, *Understanding*, 104 in this respect speaks of orthopraxy as a capacity to promote right action.

[27] Goizueta, 'Theo-Drama,' 67.

epistemological corrective to the obfuscations of sin. Confronting the socially, politically, and economically powerful with the truth about the impacts of their actions, the poor illuminate the truth about society, thus elucidating Christ's presence in the world.[28] As Katie Grimes asserts, 'spoken aesthetically, until we see the crucified people as beautiful, we shall see neither the real Christ nor his true beauty.'[29] Drawing from our discussion so far, I would like to suggest that beauty (and/or our experience of a lack thereof) reveals the truth about human existence, which is the *conditio sine qua non* of liberation.

In this understanding, beauty and liberation, or the aesthetic and the ethical, are organically connected. While human beings are motivated and driven by beauty, the commitment to transform the world should, for Christians, never be lost to sight. Rubem Alves, himself deeply committed to both beauty and liberation, reminds us that 'if we want to change the world, we need first of all to make people dream about beauty.'[30] It is precisely in a world afflicted by various divisions, tragedies, exploitation, suffering, and death that we need to appeal to beauty for a vision of a different, better reality. Alves's is a holistic project that operates on a double principle of aesthetics and ethics. 'Through the ability to dream', Raimundo Barreto – in his interpretation of Alves – elucidates, 'beauty feeds a deeply rooted motivation to transform reality, not from outside, but from within broken bodies and hearts, which only beauty can move.'[31] This kind of 'dreaming' is far from indulging oneself with empty fantasies. Here, I believe, Barreto points to what is rendered by the complex term 'imagination'. Imagination thus accounts for 'a complex activity that engages body, mind, and affect', drawing upon 'a person's past history, present experience, and future projections in an effort to know and make meaning of reality'.[32] I have suggested elsewhere that imagination, in a theological perspective,

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[28] The idea of 'inverted mirror' comes from Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), especially 261 and 245–46.

[29] Katie Grimes, ' "But Do the Lord Care?": Tupac Shakur as Theologian of the Crucified People,' *Political Theology* 15, no. 4 (2014): 326–52, 330, doi: 10.1179/1462317X14Z.0 0000000082.

[30] Rubem Alves, 'From Liberation Theologian to Poet: A Plea that the Church Move from Ethics to Aesthetics, from Doing to Beauty,' *Church & Society* 83 (1993): 20–24. Alves is quoted in Barreto, 'Prophet,' 12.

[31] Barreto, 'Prophet,' 12.

[32] Sr Mary Karita Ivancic, 'Imagining Faith: The Biblical Imagination in Theory and Practice,' *Theological Education* 41, no. 2 (2006): 127–39, 127.

functions as both deconstructive (transgressive) and reconstructive (eschatological).[33] Theologians of liberation, such as Jon Sobrino, interpret this deconstructive-reconstructive process in terms of the coming of the reign of God:

> The reign of God is not simply a utopia to be hoped and striven for. It is a utopia to be anticipated and constructed in opposition to historical realities, in opposition to objective sin. This sin is substantially whatever puts persons to death by structural means – by structural injustice, by institutionalized violence – in a word, by repression. The holiness that constructs the reign is altogether conscious of its struggle with this sin.[34]

Corrupted by sin, yet embraced by grace and empowered by the Spirit, the imagination can therefore enable people to confront the ugliness of the status quo and actively participate in God's bringing about the beauty of a new creation.

Echoing the aforementioned conviction, the aesthetic and the ethical, beauty and liberation, also come together in the work of Stefanie Knauss, who argues that our experiences with that which is beautiful, pleasing, and delightful do not necessarily have to make us oblivious to suffering and injustice but rather turn us attentive to it, 'empowering us to imagine a different world of shared beauty and flourishing, and work towards realizing it'.[35] Human – and, indeed, cosmic – flourishing can thus be taken as the measure of beauty from a Christian perspective.[36] Christians can only escape the trap of turning beauty into abstraction if, as Goizueta proposes, we make sure that our 'Christian theology of beauty… be grounded in the particularity of the crucified and risen Christ and in our… solidarity with him as we encounter him today among the crucified victims of our own societies.'[37]

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[33] See Pavol Bargár, 'The Role of the Imagination in Theology,' in *Poetry and Theology*, ed. Maroš Nicák (Jihlava: Mlýn, 2018), 213–29, especially at 217–28.

[34] Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 129. Similarly, inspired by Schillebeeckx's concept of 'negative contrast experience,' Antonio Sison ponders on the paradox of the experience of human suffering and death becoming fuel for a praxis that galvanizes opposition against life-denying forces. See Sison, 'Reign-Focus,' 48.

[35] Knauss, 'Sensing,' 98.

[36] See also Grimes, 'But Do the Lord Care,' 329–30 as she draws a correlation between the beauty of Christ's cross and the liberation of the poor.

[37] Roberto S. Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 122.

This all points, I would like to suggest, to the redemptive or transformative power of beauty. The latter lies in beauty's ability to open doors to new and previously unheard-of dimensions of reality. This is done by providing images that contradict the inhuman, unjust, and evil and offering those that nurture positive, life-affirming alternatives.[38] To be sure, the measure of beauty is the flourishing of humankind and creation. From a theological point of view, the ideal is the working toward a Christian theology – and, indeed, faith and praxis – that, with regard to both beauty and liberation, must necessarily be committed, engaged, and empowering. In this respect, Stefanie Knauss develops outlines of what she calls 'aisthetic theology'. She turns to a classic notion of *aisthesis* in the sense of a concrete sensory, embodied experience (of the material reality, including human bodies, art, and nature) to make a case for theologising that is rooted in the everyday, with all its pleasures and delights as well as sorrows and sufferings.[39] Such theologising is embedded in webs of relationships, fosters the flourishing of humankind and creation, and encourages openness, diversity, and inclusivity. As such, aisthetic theology taps into the incarnational and sacramental character of the Christian faith as it situates people in the goodness of creation and zooms in on the central importance of relationships with the others and God.[40]

Here, again, the notion of 'praxis' comes to the foreground. To conclude this section, I would like to reassert that praxis is crucial for our topic as it seeks to introduce a moment of commitment to social, cultural, and religious change to the human quest for meaning, truth, goodness, and beauty.

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[38] See de Gruchy, *Christianity*, 199–200.

[39] Knauss reminds us that to be faithful to its calling aisthetic theological reflection must consider not only museums and 'opera tickets' (high culture) but also dance and sports (low culture) and even 'the taste of mangoes and the smell of rain, the texture of tree bark or soft cotton.' See Knauss, 'Sensing,' 95–96.

[40] See Knauss, 'Sensing,' 94, 95, and 96. Aisthetic theology, in this understanding, comes close to various types of liberationist theologies. However, Knauss's proposal for *aisthetic* theology is not to be confused with what, for example, Roberto Goizueta labels as *aesthetic* theology. The latter, Goizueta contends, is nothing but reflection on religious experience in which beauty remains abstract and disembodied. He, for his part, therefore makes a case for a theological aesthetics of liberation that is rooted in the particularity of the crucified and risen Christ and the solidarity with those who suffer around us, thus making a demand on our believing, thinking, and action. See Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion*, 122.

3. Beauty and Liberation in *The Power of the Dog*

In what follows, my intention is to illustrate the point I have argued in this paper by theologically reflecting on beauty and liberation in a particular work of cinematography. New Zealand director and screenwriter Jane Campion, in her 2021 Netflix-produced film *The Power of the Dog*, undertakes the task of revisiting the Western as the genre that has had the lion's share in establishing a host of American myths with their distinct aesthetics and ethics. The Western is commonly perceived as one of the film genres dominated by hypertrophied masculinity. The focus is on the lonely, independent, and strong hero, the 'tough guy', who always knows what is exactly right and good and which side to take. It was not only in the American collective imagination that this character significantly shaped a particular ethos with its ideals of beauty and goodness.

It is true in more than one respect that *The Power of the Dog* stands in line with classic works of the Western canon. Set in early twentieth-century Montana, the storyline concentrates on two brothers, Phil and George Burbank, running a major cattle ranch. It is especially Phil, who is a prominent figure and the true manager of the ranch. Interestingly, several contrasting personae are integrated in Phil. Yale-trained in classics, on the one hand, he displays a refined taste for literature, music, and painting. And yet, on the other hand, he at the same time embodies the stereotypical features of a cowboy as a tough, dominant male figure who seeks to pass this aesthetics and values on to ranch workers – truly, his 'disciples'. In the process, Phil – in an authoritarian manner – spreads toxic masculinity and is a source of subjugation and humiliation for those around him, especially his brother George and the latter's recently wedded bride, Rose. Here, beauty is disconnected from liberation due to the inappropriate exercise of power and control.

However, Campion goes on further to undermine such an image of masculinity as well as the Western as a genre.[41] Formally, her

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[41] My point here concurs with Antonio Sison's discussion of the concept of Third Cinema. Even though initially derived from the geopolitical notion 'Third World,' Third Cinema goes beyond the geographical origin of a given film in order to express the commitment to authentically represent the struggle of the marginalized to 'become agents of their own history in the postcolonial aftermath.' As such, Third Cinema effectively becomes a 'guerilla cinema' that both preserves popular memory and challenges dominant ideologies. See Sison, 'Reign-Focus,' 46.

auteur's intention is inconspicuously yet convincingly expressed, for instance, through the fact that not one gunshot is fired and, further, no firearm is displayed throughout the film. Even more subversive is Campion's treatment of the story and characters. For the purposes of this paper, a *pars pro toto* example will suffice. There is a new twist to the story when Peter, Rose's son from her previous marriage and a student of medicine, comes to spend his summer vacation at the ranch. A skinny and pale lad with a penchant for arranging flowers and engaging in scientific experiments, Peter obviously does not fit in the testosterone-laden context of the ranch. Ridiculed by the ranch workers for what they see as his effeminate visage and behaviour, he nevertheless eventually discovers a way to counter them – and break free.

It is important to note that Peter – with his subversive power and shrewd action – reminds us of biblical Jacob. Like for Jacob in his relationship with his mother Rebecca (Gen 25:28), Peter's mother is also his closest ally and 'soulmate'. Furthermore, Jacob is one who spends much of his time 'at home among the tents' (Gen 25:27, NIV) and thence in the vicinity of women. This feature sharply distinguishes the biblical patriarch from his brother Esau, a hunter and a man of the field. In an analogical manner, a similarly strong contrast can be drawn between Peter and the cowboys at the ranch, most notably Phil himself. Most importantly, however, it is their astute demeanour that Jacob and Peter have in common. Through their sly ways, they both navigate their lives and seize the opportunities that would remain unattainable for them through the means of conventional 'masculine' behaviour.

It is perhaps even to the greater extent that Peter's character shares commonalities with that of the psalmist due to an explicit reference to Psalm 22. In this psalm, the main protagonist self-identifies as a 'worm' (v. 6), an image intended to represent not only something of little value but also something ugly.[42] Still, this ugliness can be transformed into the beautiful and meaningful. The psalmist's hope in God is what makes all the difference. Therefore, to once again turn to the imagery employed by the psalm, it is not 'lions' and 'bulls' (vv. 12–13) but rather a 'worm' that has a future before God. Using theological language, the psalm shows us that God did not 'despise' or 'abhor' the 'affliction of the afflicted' (v. 24) but, I would argue, found the beauty in the *conditio humana* to liberate the psalmist.

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[42] I use the translation according to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

In her reading of Psalm 22, Katie Grimes likens the psalmist – and, by Christian theological interpretation, the crucified Christ – to the crucified peoples of today. In her contemporary US context, the latter are by and large represented by people of colour who suffer disenfranchisement, institutional abuse, or unfair legal treatment. Psalm 22 supplies, for Grimes, 'Christological checks and balances' for identifying the crucified people.[45] It is on account of their commonly perceived ugliness that the crucified people, the 'worms' of today, have the potential to illuminate the beauty of the cross, thus pointing to God's liberating action.[44] Here, I would reiterate the point I have made earlier, drawing from Katie Grimes's theological-aesthetic reflections, that 'until we see the crucified people as beautiful, we shall see neither the real Christ nor his true beauty'.[45] Furthermore, it is the crucified people who anchor beauty in the lived reality, shaped by ugliness and sin, thereby preventing Christian theological aesthetics from contenting itself with complacency and complicity in the status quo.[46] Making a Christological extrapolation from the kerygmatic focus provided by Psalm 22, one can say that by inverting the categories of beauty and ugliness, Christ's cross – and, indeed, the event of his crucifixion and resurrection – does not merely stand for the victory of life over death but the victory of justice over injustice as it represents God's vindication of the 'worm', of the innocent victim.[47] That certainly has implications for Christian praxis, embracing the categories of beauty and liberation. As Roberto Goizueta suggests:

> If a Christian theological aesthetics takes as its starting point God's own praxis as expressed in the Crucified and Risen Christ, then our own participation in the divine praxis, our own role in theo-drama, must be undertaken in solidarity with the innocent victims who daily are condemned to death.[48]

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[45] Grimes, 'But Do the Lord Care,' 330.
[44] See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 261–62.
[45] Grimes, 'But Do the Lord Care,' 330.
[46] See also James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 35.
[47] See also Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 36–48.
[48] Goizueta, 'Theo-Drama,' 72.

In *The Power of the Dog*, ultimately, Peter seems to manage to be freed from toxic masculinity and establish his identity differently from the practice common for most men around him. It is admittedly a fragile but beautiful identity, symbolised by flowers that he likes to arrange. Importantly, it is one that nurtures hope for and a possibility of liberation (for Peter's mother and himself) and reconciliation (between Peter's mother and her in-laws).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to suggest that beauty represents an important theme for theological reflection on faith and praxis *and* arts and culture. More specifically, I believe to have shown that beauty belongs together with liberation as an indispensable part of God's project of transforming the whole of reality toward a new heaven and a new earth. The transformative power of beauty lies in its capability to provide images that challenge the evil and inhuman and help imagine the just and life-affirming. To be sure, it is in fact a divine-human project as humans are invited to become active agents in this transformation. Furthermore, this dynamic is to be envisaged as nurturing interdependency, bringing together both the individual and communal aspects of being human. To be in relation with others, Christians should insist, calls for a type of solidarity that transcends one's own social group and demonstrates that every human community has a role to play in the coming reign of God.

In conclusion, I would like to propose that theological-anthropological discourse on beauty and liberation can helpfully bring together three aspects.[49] First, the aesthetic aspect addresses how beauty is related to the experiences of transcendence in the quest for transformation. Second, the liberationist aspect is focused on a commitment to the flourishing of humankind and creation as envisioned, first and foremost, in the eschatological imagery of the Scriptures (e.g., a new heaven and a new earth – Isa 65:17, Rev 21:1). And, finally, the two are in a sense joined in what can be termed as the ontological aspect which offers a meaningful account of existence vis-à-vis the ultimate consummation of God's reign. It is essential to emphasise, however, that all three of these aspects are inseparable from everyday reality, including

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[49] For this insight I am inspired by Lynch, *Understanding*, 98.

its tears, sweat, and wounds. In other words, the Christian understanding of beauty and liberation is inherently incarnational, even while featuring a robust eschatological and transcendental focus. From a theological perspective, ultimately, this discourse – and the human yearning for transformation – must be carried on by a hope that the process of contemplation, critique, and construction of reality from the vantage point of beauty and liberation lies at the heart of Christian identity.

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VARIA

LESS KNOWN ICONOGRAPHY
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE VIRGIN MARY IN THE PRAGUE LORETO
IN CONNECTION WITH THE TEACHING
OF ST LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI

MARIE VYMAZALOVÁ

ABSTRACT

The text describes and contextualises collections of sermons by Lawrence of Brindisi about the Virgin Mary called *Mariale*, mainly the sermons about the teachings of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Lawrence of Brindisi, a capuchin monk and a European diplomat, was an important person in European church history of the 16th and the 17th centuries, but his texts are not yet fully appreciated. The text compares the theological question with the works of art from Prague Loreta. The comparison of the layout of this Marian pilgrimage place and thoughts of Franciscan spirituality contained in Lawrence's sermons demonstrates the mutual interconnection between the specific period of theological thinking and a particular example of artistic expression.

Keywords

Iconography; Immaculate Conception; Virgin Mary; Prague Loreto; Lawrence of Brindisi

'…If piousness is not only sustained on doctrines of the learned, but if it is visibly displayed in majestic buildings, imperishable memorials and witnesses seemingly planted by the hand of God Himself, belief of our contemporaries and those who will come and admire these remarkable works will survive and grow. Yes, belief will survive and strengthen and eternal humbleness in the face of a miracle will come.'

Pope Nicolas V[1]

Lawrence of Brindisi, an important European diplomat, a significant figure of the Capuchin order at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, a saint and, last but not least, a *doctor apostolicus,* left a great intellectual work for the future generations which, however, was not published in print until the 20th century. His texts are therefore not yet fully appreciated. The aim of this text is to describe and contextualise one of his largest collections of sermons about the Virgin Mary called *Mariale*, mainly the sermons about the teachings of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. This part will be the basis for the follow-up analysis[2] of the Prague Loreto in the 17th century, where this theological question repeatedly appears through selected works of art. The comparison of the layout of this Marian pilgrimage place and thoughts of Franciscan spirituality contained in Lawrence's sermons will underline the mutual interconnection between specific period theological thinking and a particular example of artistic expression.

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[1] The quotation was taken from Alick McLean, 'Italian architecture of late Middle Age,' in *Umění italské renesance: architektura, sochařství, malířství, kresba*, ed. Rolf Toman (Praha: Slovart, 1996), 12.

[2] The iconographic method was developed by Erwin Panofsky, who divides it into the stages of pre-iconographic description (teaching of the original significance), iconographic description (teaching of the secondary significance, i.e. of the concrete depicted story or allegory), and iconographic analysis (determination of the inner significance based on the knowledge of important tendencies of human thinking in that period, contained, for example, in philosophical or theological texts and other sources). See Erwin Panofsky, *Význam ve výtvarném umění* (Praha: Academia, 2013), 41–55.

1. Lawrence of Brindisi and his Theological Work

Lawrence of Brindisi[5] (born Giulio Cesare Russo, 1559–1619) came from the town of Brindisi in south Italy, but from 1574, he lived in Venice, where he became familiar with the Capuchin Order. He took a monastic vow two years later in Verona. In both these important Italian cities, he studied philosophy and theology and gained good humane education and language skills. It was crucial for his future successful diplomatic activity in Italy, Spain, and Bohemia. In 1599, he brought the first Capuchin order mission to the Bohemian land. It settled in Hradčany in Prague after long negotiations with the imperial court, and it started its missionary activities. Lawrence was a very eloquent preacher and conducted repeated polemics with the non-Catholics, not only in the Czech milieu. He highly honoured the Virgin Mary because she allegedly cured his stomach disease, which had interrupted his studies in his young years. Lawrence died in Lisbon while fulfilling his diplomatic tasks in 1619. Soon the process of his beatification commenced, which was expected to be completed soon, as it was common in the early 17th century. However, the decision of Pope Urban VIII, who railed against fast canonisation processes and determined a period of 50 years after a candidate's death, halted this intention for many years. St. Lawrence was beatified as late as 1783 and canonised a hundred years later, in 1881. In 1959, Pope John XXIII conferred a degree of *doctor apostolicus* on him. Conferring this degree is also reflected in the increased interest in Lawrence's theological works during the first half of the 20th century.[4]

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[5] The most extensive work on this person is still Arturo M., da Carmignano di Brenta, *San Lorenzo da Brindisi: Dottore della Chiesa universale*, 4 vols., Miscellanea Laurentiana 4 (Venezia: Curia Provinciale dei FF. MM. Cappuccini, 1960–1963). The latest one is Andrew J. G. Drenas, *The Standard Bearer of the Roman Church: Lawrence of Brindisi and Capuchin Missions in the Holy Roman Empire (1599–1613)* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2018). In the Czech milieu it is Vavřinec Rabas, *Sv. Vavřinec z Brindisi, zakladatel česko-moravské provincie řádu kapucínského* (Olomouc: Dominikánská Edice Krystal, 1941) The latest one is Alessandro Catalano, '"Duchovní válka slov" na začátku 17. století a Vavřinec z Brindisi (1559–1619),' in *Pax et Bonum: Kapucíni v Čechách a na Moravě v raném novověku*, ed. Brčák Marek and Wolf Jiří (Příbram: Scriptorium, 2020), 54–60.

[4] In the 20th century Lawrence's theological contribution was assessed, mainly in the field of Mariology, which was examined in detail by G. M. Roschini, see Gabriele M. Roschini, 'La Mariologia di S. Lorenzo da Brindisi (A),' in *Lorenzo da Brindisi: studi: conferenze commemorative dell'edizione Opera omnia*, ed. Clemente da Santa Maria, *Miscellanea Laurentiana* 1 (Padova: Gregoriana, 1951), 141–179. Gabriele

Editing and publishing of Lawrence's manuscripts was initiated by his home community in Venice in the early 20th century.[5] The first of fifteen published volumes was a collection of Virgin Mary sermons *Mariale* comprising eighty-four manuscripts.[6] The sermons in *Mariale* are arranged into topic-based groups, e.g. The Woman of the Apocalypse in John's Revelation, The Salutation of the Angel, The Assumption of the Virgin Mary, etc. One of these topics is focused on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.[7] Every sermon is structured into short, numbered subchapters with arguments in which Lawrence first presents the given aspect of the mystery on which he wants to focus in the sermon. In the following chapters, he develops the topic to sum it up finally in conclusion. His construction of the text is therefore clearly structured and well thought-through.

Lawrence opens the topic of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary with a general contemplation.[8] He accentuates Mary's motherhood and calls her God's dwelling full of mercy which was created for the Son of God. He argues that God is almighty, thanks to which God could and wanted to protect the Virgin Mary from sin. His reasoning is based on frequent quotations from the Holy Scripture and Church Fathers; very often, he refers to the salutation of angel during the annunciation, for example. However, the actual doctrine is seen in the context of the period. Thanks to his studies, Lawrence was aware of the theological development of the doctrine, even one of its

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M. Roschini, *La Mariologia di S. Lorenzo da Brindisi (B)*, Miscellanea Laurentiana 2 (Padova: Gregoriana, 1951). In the Lawrence's bibliography from 1961, there are more than eighty other specialist texts just for the topic of Mariology. Felice da Mareto, *Bibliographia Laurentiana*, Subsidia scientifica Franciscalia (Roma: Inst. Hist. Ord. Fr. Min. Cap., 1962). Currently the topic of theological activities of St Lawrence is becoming relevant again, see Gabriele Ingegneri, ed., *San Lorenzo da Brindisi Doctor Apostolicus nell'Europa tra Cinque e Seicento: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Venezia, 17-19 ottobre 2019)* (Venezia: Biblioteca Provinciale Cappuccini, 2021).

[5]   Laurentius de Brindisi, Opera omnia: a patribus min. capuccinis prov. Venetae e textu originali nunc primum in lucem edita notisque illustrata, Padova, 1928–1956.

[6]   Vernon Wagner, 'Foreword,' in *The Mariale*, ed. Vavřinec z Brindisi and Vernon Wagner, trans. Vernon Wagner (Delhi: Media Haus, 2007), preface, unpaged.

[7]   In the course of time, the first Latin edition was complemented with other editions in other language variants. The author worked with two of them. The older one, in Italian language comprises twelve individual sermons delivered on the day celebrating the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the younger one, in English language, comprises only eleven. Lawrence of Brindisi and Mariano da Alatri, eds., *Le Feste della Madonna* (Roma: Libreria mariana, 1959). Lawrence of Brindisi and Vernon Wagner, eds., *The Mariale*, trans. Vernon Wagner (Delhi: Media Haus, 2007).

[8]   Lawrence of Brindisi and Wagner, *The Mariale*, 276–289.

breakthrough moments in 1439, when the Council of Basel, on its XXXVI meeting, accepted a decree of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and its celebration was set to be on the 8th December according to the existing tradition. Even though the council lost its legitimacy soon after and the announcement could not be accepted as a dogma, the wording of the decree influenced the following development mainly in the countries whose representatives took part in the council (Italy, Spain, France, and Germany).[9] He does not forget about the significance of the Immaculate Conception in the European university milieu. He feels that this doctrine, which he does not doubt at all, is reflected in the religious reverence of the believers, and therefore it is lived by Church, even though it has not announced it as its dogma yet.

The second sermon presents Mary as an infinite light of mercy. Like God, the Virgin Mary is also likened to light which excludes darkness and therefore a sin. In this part, St Lawrence also celebrates the beauty of the Virgin Mary in three spheres (head, body, and legs), similar to a human being, who is divided into three parts – body, soul, and spiritual thinking. These parts are then connected with the individual virtues in connection with the teaching by St Thomas Aquinas (body – chastity, moral integrity, and other civil virtues; soul – cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, moderation, and bravery; thought – theological virtues: belief, hope, and love).[10] The third sermon likens Mary to the new God's ark, which is compared with the old 'three-dimensional' square ark with golden rings in the corners. The element of number four is again compared to Cardinal virtues, number three to theological ones.[11] Using this example, we can show one of the generally valid principles of Lawrence's sermons. Some lines of reasoning are repeated across his sermons, in a slightly altered context. This is the case, for example, in the emphasis on the square shape of the ark, mentioned already in the first sermon, when the number four is presented as a symbol of Divinity with respect to the name of God himself (JHVH). However, he also mentions the Pythagorean teaching of Tetractys which considers the number four to be the ideal number.[12] Lawrence's width of intellectual sources was extensive and various. In the simile of the Virgin Mary as a new ark, he refers to the Old Testament. At the same time, he

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[9]   Gabriele M. Roschini, *Dizionario di Mariologia* (Roma: Editrice Studium, 1961), 224.
[10]   Lawrence of Brindisi and Wagner, *The Mariale*, 395–396.
[11]   Lawrence of Brindisi and Wagner, *The Mariale*, 406.
[12]   Lawrence of Brindisi and Wagner, *The Mariale*, 385–386; Ex 25.

complements this idea with the teaching of Ancient Greek philosophy. He also follows up the first contemplations of Church Fathers about this topic. St Hippolytus of Rome uses exactly the same simile in his work *De Christo et Antichristo.*[13]

The fourth sermon interprets the Virgin Mary as a house of the embodied Word, as a house of Christ. Her womb was blessed, and therefore she can bring blessing to all believers. The fifth sermon about Mary as a dwelling of God mentions Mary as a new Eve and Christ as a new Adam. At the same time, however, it calls the Mother of God the Queen of the world, Queen of angels, Queen of saints, etc. In this part of Mariale, for the first time, there is a reference to Isaiah's words about the Jesse Tree: '*A staff shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom.*'[14] It is a reference which is repeated in the whole text of Mariale and which is connected with the theme of Immaculate Conception in art, as it is shown below. The sixth sermon is focused on the Revelation of St. John and the motif of the Woman of the Apocalypse, and the seventh sermon returns to the creation of Adam and Eve as the first house of God, which was later destroyed. And thanks to her purity, the Virgin Mary became a new temple. In this sermon, Lawrence refers to Thomas Aquinas and his opinion that those who were chosen by God for a task were also prepared for it.[15] St Lawrence sees just the purity of the Virgin Mary as this preparation. He also supports it with a quotation from the Holy Scripture: '*And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God."*'[16] Lawrence thus copes with the older great theological personalities that can be included rather in a maculistic group. However, he does so with reference to the parts of the Bible (Annunciation) which were during the whole development of the doctrine considered the basic Bible quotations for reasoning.[17]

The eighth sermon deals with Mary as a bride and mother of God. The ninth sermon likens Mary and Christ to a gate. Mary is a gate

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[13] Stefano de Fiores, 'Immacolata,' in *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, ed. Stefano de Fiores and Salvatore Meo (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1986), 684.

[14] Lawrence of Brindisi and Wagner, *The Mariale*, 423, Iz 11,1–2.

[15] Lawrence realises, however, that Thomas Aquinas, together with Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventura, were not supporters of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Lawrence of Brindisi and Wagner, *The Mariale*, 438–439.

[16] Lk 1,30

[17] Aristide Serra, 'Immacolata. Fondamenti Biblici,' in *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, 690; Roschini, *Dizionario di Mariologia*, 217.

through which Christ came to us. Christ is then a gate through which the believers approach God. The tenth sermon describes Mary as the root of the humanity of Christ, a throne chamber, and pure water. Lawrence reminds us of the Biblical story about Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw a great tree with its top touching heaven. However, this tree, symbolising human nature, was destroyed by sin and a new shoot sprouted from its stump – Christ. He also speaks highly about three virtues of Mary – gracefulness of body and soul, humbleness, and her noble authority.[18] The eleventh sermon, and the twelfth one, in the Italian edition, are summarising discourses.

2. The doctrine of The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

As regards the reasoning, Lawrence follows up the line started by John Duns Scotus (1265–1308), a member of the Franciscan order, who deals with the topic of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary mainly in his work *Ordinatio*. His reasoning for this doctrine, sometimes described with the word 'necdum', is based on this statement:

> Nondum erant abyssi et ego iam concepta eram, necdum fontes aquarum eruperant, necdum montes grafi mole constiterant, ante colles ego parturiebar. adhuc terram non fecerat et flumina et cardines orbis terrae.

He believes that it would be appropriate for Christ to be born from a woman without an original sin. God Almighty could and wanted to do so, and therefore it happened.[19] John Duns Scotus presented his formulation very carefully as a probable one not to be accused of heresy.[20] The same reasoning in the sense of *Potuit, decuit ergo fecit* is also used by Lawrence.[21]

In the 15th century, i.e. in the safer era for immaculist doctrine, Scotus's arguments were revived by the Padua theologist and Franciscan Francesco della Rovere, later Sixtus IV (1414–1484), who was a great supporter of the immaculist idea. In 1448, he created a sermon

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[18] Lawrence of Brindisi and Wagner, *The Mariale*, 455–456.
[19] Dino Cortese, 'Francesco della Rovere e le "Orationes" sull'Immacolata del vescovo di Padova Fantino Dandolo (1448),' *Il Santo* 17, no. 2 (1977): 198–199.
[20] Fiores, 'Immacolata,' 686.
[21] Lawrence of Brindisi and Mariano da Alatri, *Le Feste della Madonna*, XII–XIII.

on the topic of the Immaculate Conception for the Church of St Anthony in Padua, which was delivered there by the local bishop Frantino Dandola. Originally, the authorship was attributed to the bishop himself, but Dino Cortese, in his historic, graphological and mainly philological research, proved that the real author is Francesco della Rovere.[22] The future pope also builds his reasoning on the same principle, i.e. 'Necdum'. Moreover, he mentions frequent Biblical references which are not found in other Dandola's work. Among many others, in his reasoning, he uses, for example, a simile to women from the Old Testament, Nebuchadnezzar and his dream about a tree, Adam and Eve, Gideon's cloak, etc.[23] However, the defence of this doctrine by Francesco della Rovere is not finished with the sermon. Following his election as the pope in 1471, Sixtus IV issued two papal bulls about this question, in particular *Cum Praecelsa* in 1477 and *Grave Nimis* between 1482 and 1483. Between 1477 and 1480, he also had two liturgies of hours created. The first one, created by Sixtus's pupil Leonardo di Nogarole, was intended for the whole Church of Rome. The second one, created by Bernandino di Busto, was aimed at the Franciscan order.[24]

On the basis of the common reasoning lines and similar Biblical similes, Lawrence's sermons can be included in the intellectual tradition of John Duns Scotus as well as Sixtus IV.

3. The Iconography of The Immaculate Conception

The above-described complicated development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is obviously in strong

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[22] Cortese, 'Francesco della Rovere e le "Orationes" sull'Immacolata del vescovo di Padova Fantino Dandolo (1448),' 207–213.

[23] At the beginning of the sermon, he also mentions the Revelation of St Bridget of Sweden. For a transcript of the sermon, see, 215–225.

[24] There will be only a brief outline of the further development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as it is not necessary for the development of the text. The Council of Trent commented the Immaculate Conception only indirectly in the decree on the original sin. The doctrine was further supported by Pope Alexander VII in the papal bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum* issued in 1661. The last important turning point is the year 1854, when the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary was announced by Pope Pius IV. For a basic outline of the doctrine development, see e.g. Roschini, *Dizionario di Mariologia*; Fiores, 'Immacolata'; Serra, 'Immacolata. Fondamenti Biblici.'; Václav Wolf, *Neposkvrněné početí Panny Marie v průběhu historie* (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 2005); René Laurentin, *Pojednání o Panně Marii* (Prague: Krystal OP, 2005).

LESS KNOWN ICONOGRAPHY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

contrast to the development of the motif in the history of art. For the development of the iconography of this topic, the turning point was the second half of the 17th century when it prevailed to use a traditional depiction of Immaculata as a young girl or woman with loose hair on a crescent of the moon and a snake under her feet, i.e. with clear references to the Woman of the Apocalypse. This gradual codification of the topic had been going since the Council of Trent, after which there occurred the first theological theorems on how to process the topic in art, for example, Molan's work *De pictoris et imaginibus sacris* or Charles Borromeo's work *De pictura sacra*.[25] The discussion is later joined by artists, for example, the Spanish artist Francesco Pacheco, who recommended in his work *Arte de la pintura, su antigüedad y su grandeza* to depict Mary with the attributes of the Woman of the Apocalypse. This type of visualisation was later popularised by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo.[26] The actual acceptance of the dogma in 1854 did not mean any further significant iconographic changes.

What preceded this artistic usage accepted in the second half of the 17th century? Despite the fact that the dogma was not accepted by the Church officially, the theme of the Immaculate Conception occurred in art. However, there was no unified usage of it. As it is mentioned by Sarah Blake Mcham, works with this theme have two basic characteristic features. The discussed theological idea is hard to express in the visual form as it cannot be approached using a direct, narrative scene, only a substitutional one. Thus a resulting visualisation was only used once or repeated only to a minimum degree very often.[27] Due to that, the actual meaning of the work could be lost in the course of time. As regards the iconographic method, the pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis were fulfilled. But the iconographic interpretation was not performed sufficiently because the connection to certain theological ideas was lost. Thanks to the study of coherent literary sources, however, some works of art were 'rediscovered' in the last decades and reinterpreted with respect to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. The best-known examples include Donatello's main

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[25] Serra, 'Immacolata. Fondamenti Biblici.'
[26] Jan Royt, *Slovník biblické ikonografie* (Prague: Carolinum, 2006), 191–192.
[27] Sarah Blake McHam, 'Visualizing the Immaculate Conception: Donatello, Francesco della Rovere, and the High Altar and choir screen at the church of the Santo in Padua,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2016): 831–864.

altar in the Church of St Anthony in Padua or Leonardo's The Madonna of the Rocks.[28]

As pointed out by Sarah Blake McHam, Donatello's alter is connected directly with the sermons by Sixtus IV.[29] It is proved, for example, in the text in repeated emphasis on Mary's womb and artistic depiction of the figure of the Virgin Mary, who holds Christ very unusually in front of her lap. Similarly, in later works of art, Christ is depicted directly in Mary's womb.[30] McHam also points out that the current state of the altar is not original. Seven main statues, the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus, St Francis, St Anthony, St Justina, Daniel, St Louis of Toulouse, and Prosdocimus are now placed in a cascade way on the altar. She supposes that it was originally grouped in the so-called S*acra Conversazione*. The figures of the significant personalities of the Franciscan order and patron saints of the town were supposed to be roofed with a canopy (lost nowadays) that depicted God the Father shading the Virgin Mary – it means protecting her symbolically against sin.[31]

Levi D'Ancona connects Leonardo's composition of the Madonna of the Rocks, which was created for the Franciscan brotherhood of the Immaculate Conception in the Church of St. Francesco Grande in Milan, with the above-mentioned Milan monk Bernardino de'Busti. The creation of the painting was initiated by the approval of de'Busti's new immaculate liturgy of the hours.[32] The interpretation of the painting as the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is a generally accepted fact. It only differs in concrete ways of explanation, whether it is a depiction of yet uncreated world accenting Mary's purity since the beginning of time or it refers to the second chapter of the Book of Daniel.[33]

However, these are very specific and complicated iconographic constructions which could not always be built. As an indirect depiction

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[28] Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (New York: College Art Ass. of America, 1957).

[29] Blake Mcham, 'Visualizing the Immaculate Conception.'

[30] Blake Mcham, 'Visualizing the Immaculate Conception,' 842.

[31] Blake McHam, 'Visualizing the Immaculate Conception,' 846–847. Kim E. Butler also used the motive of the Immaculate Conception for one of the other interpretations of the Sistine Chapel ceiling because of the connection between Sixtus IV. and Julius II. Kim E. Butler, 'The immaculate body in the Sistine ceiling,' *Art history* 32, no. 2 (2009): 250–289.

[32] Levi D'Ancona, *The iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance*, 73.

[33] Stefaniak 1997, 5; Butler, 'The immaculate body in the Sistine ceiling,' 254.

of the theme of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary before its codification, artists used a topic of Joachim and Anne meeting at the Golden gate, possibly complemented with their kiss – a symbol of Mary's conception. Different visualisation was a depiction of the Virgin Mary in St Anne's womb or Birth of the Virgin Mary. Another traditionally connected motif was the Jesse Tree that accentuated the Virgin Mary as part of the history of Israel.[34] However, at the same time, it refers to Isaiah's prophecy of the Saviour.[35] As analogies from the Old Testament, artists used the stories of Esther, who saved the people of Israel during Persian domination or a depiction of Adam and Eve.[36] The difficult-to-express narration of the immaculist doctrine is also depicted as a discussion of significant theologians and saints about this topic expressed by the person of the Virgin Mary. The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary can also be expressed using various symbols, following up both Biblical analogies or patristic texts. The basis for these depictions could be, for example, Loreto litanies with many similes of the figure of the Virgin Mary.[37] Another symbolism is, for example, a depiction of the Virgin Mary as a throne of wisdom.[38]

4. The Immaculate Conception from Amadeit Church in Milan

It is due to this wide variety and local variability that we cannot deal with all the examples of the depiction of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary before its codification in the 17th century. For the further development of the text, however, I will mention one more concrete example of this topic of Immaculate Conception, which relates to both the person of Pope Sixtus IV and the Franciscan spirituality

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[34] Vincenzo Francia, 'L'Immacolata Concezione: alla ricerca di un modello iconografico,' in *Una donna vestita di sole*, ed. Giovanni Morello, Vincenzo Francia and Roberto Fusco (Milan: Motta, 2005), 36.

[35] Iz 11,1–2.

[36] Adam and Eve were depicted as the first God's creation which was, however, destroyed by sin. Another meaning can be their depiction of those who were also created without original sin. In this context, Mary and Christ can be seen as a new Eve and a new Adam. The motif of Adam and Eve must always be explained in a concrete context. This motif was processed specifically during the 16th century thanks to the work by Giorgio Vasari, who in the space of the painting, developed a direct connection of Eve and connected Virgin Mary. Benedetta Moreschini, 'Committenza ed evoluzione iconografica dell'Immacolata Concezione nella Toscana del XVI secolo,' in Morello, Francia and Fusco, *Una donna vestita di sole*, 54–55.

[37] Francia, 'L'Immacolata Concezione,' 36.

[38] Francia, 'L'Immacolata Concezione,' 38.

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from which Lawrence proceeded. Elena Rampi described as one of the specific expressions of the topic the motif of the Adoration of Christ by the Virgin Mary originating in the Milan church of Santa Maria della Pace, a monastic church of the Amadeits, i.e. a reformed branch of the Franciscan order. The original model of this motif was an unpreserved fresco (before 1472) which was then amply repeated in the church and spread in the area surrounding Milan.[39] The scene depicts the standing Virgin Mary, bareheaded, whose clothes are either white or, in reference to the Amadeit church, covered with the word PAX. With arms crossed over her chest, Mary is bowing to newborn Jesus, who is lying naked on a white cloth spread directly on the ground. The scene is usually set in an open countryside, without any spectators. The motif quite faithfully follows a visionary text by St Bridget of Sweden influenced by Franciscan spirituality.[40]

Based on the study of the literary sources and Franciscan spirituality, E. Rampi proves that this motif also originated as one of the specific expressions of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.[41] The motif (and the text of St Bridget of Sweden) accentuates the painless birth of Jesus and the incarnation of the Son of God, which both refers to this doctrine. Besides St Birgitta's text, from the literary sources, we need to mention the text *Meditaciones vite Christi*.[42] The composi-

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[39] Anonymous, former monastery Santa Maria della Pace, Milan; Giovanni Ambrogio Bevilacqua, Gemäldegalerie Dresden; anonymous, Civici Musei, Pavia; Ambrogio Bevilacqua (attr.), Civici Musei, Pavia; anonymous, Cappella delle Donne, Chiaravalle; the circle of Camillo Procaccini, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan; Ambrogio Bergognone (attr.), Certosa, Pavia. Elena Rampi, 'La Madonna di Santa Maria della Pace: un´iconografia immacolista riconosciuta,' *Artes* IV (1996).

[40] The latest information on this topic of the iconography of the Nativity of Christ in connection to Birgitta's text Maria H. Oen, 'Iconography and Visions: St. Birgitta's Revelation of the Nativity of Christ,' in *The Locus of Meaning in Medieval Art: Iconography, Iconology and Interpreting the Visual Imagery of the Middle Ages*, ed. Lena Liepe (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 212–237; Bridget Morris and Denis M. Searby, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden III: Liber Caelestis, Books VI–VII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), book 7, chapter 21, 250–251. '*… And when all these things had thus been prepared, then the Virgin knelt with great reverence, putting herself at prayer; and she kept her back toward the manger and her face lifted to heaven toward the east. And so, with raised hands and with her eyes intent on heaven, she was as if suspended in an ecstasy of contemplation, inebriated with divine sweetness. And while she was thus in prayer, I saw the One lying in her womb then move; and then and there, in a moment and the twinkling of an eye, she gave birth to a Son, from whom there went out such great and ineffable light and splendor that the sun could not be compared to it.*'

[41] Rampi, 'La Madonna di Santa Maria della Pace,' 13.

[42] Oen, 'Iconography and Visions,' 212–223. There is an outline of the development of the motif iconography, including the discussion of Henrik Cornell and Erwin Panofsky

tion of the motif follows up the frontispiece of the Franciscan breviary deposited in the University Library in Bologna.[43] On the frontispiece, we can find the combination of two motifs – Adoration of Christ (who has his finger on his mouth) set into the Enclosed Garden (Hortus Conclusus). This frontispiece was connected with the actual doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary already by Robert Calkins.[44] It is necessary to point out that, on the same side, there is also the motif of the Annunciation, one of the central Biblical arguments for the ideas of the Immaculate Conception. The conscious interconnection of the motif of the Annunciation with the ideas of the Immaculate Conception in art in the Renaissance era, mainly within Franciscan spirituality, was later documented by Alesandra Galizzi Kroegel.[45]

5. Amadeo Menez de Sylva

The motif of the Adoration of Christ in the sense of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is therefore based on the Franciscan spirituality in the milieu in which it further developed. It was also the case of the above-described concrete example of the Amadeit composition. E. Rampi supposed that its creator was Amadeo Menez de Sylva,[46] the founder of the Amadeit order, confessor of Pope Sixtus IV

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whether the text of Birgitta's Revelation of the Nativity of Christ was created first and then depicted visually (Cornell) or whether the first initiation motif was the visual one and on this Birgitta based her text (Panofsky). The author of the publication *Meditaciones vite Christi* is possibly the Franciscan brother John of Caulibus who created it for an unnamed Clarist in the 14th century in the Tuscany area. Holly Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination: The Paris 'Meditationes Vitae Christi' and Female Franciscan Spirituality in Trecento Italy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 17.

[43] Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, ms. 337. Rampi, 'La Madonna di Santa Maria della Pace,' 9.

[44] Robert G. Calkins, 'The Master of the Franciscan Breviary,' *Arte lombarda* 16 (1971), 19th tape, see Letter 1, 16.

[45] Alessandra Galizzi Kroegel, 'Franciscan Wordplay in Renaissance Annunciations,' *The Canadian Journal of Rhetorical Studies* 4 (1994).

[46] Amadeo Menez de Sylva (1427–1482) entered the Franciscan order in 1456. Later, he established a congregation of the Amadeits based on the Franciscan monastic order. They founded their first monastery in Bressano near Castelleone thanks to the support from Bianca Marie Visconti in 1460. Subsequently, in 1468 they established the above-mentioned monastery of S. Maria della Pace in Milan. In 1472, this monastery and the congregation were promised the protection by new Pope Sixtus IV with respect to discords with other branches of the Franciscan order. At the same time, Amadeo was called to Rome and became the Pope's personal confessor. Amadeo was put in charge of the church of S. Pietro in Montorio. In 1482, during visitation of his monasteries, he died in Milano, in the monastery of S. Maria della Pace.

and the author of the text Apocalypsis Nuova, which also refers to the Immaculate Conception. Like in the above-mentioned examples, there was also the cooperation of a theologian and an artist in the creation of this work. Amadeo himself was seen very ambivalently, already during his life, and the same applied later to his text, which was supposed to be a record of his dialogue with the Archangel Gabriel during his frequent visions on the Janiculum.[47] After his death, the text was sealed and opened as late as in 1502 upon the order of Cardinal Bernardino Lopez de Carvajal. After opening the manuscript, the text was probably reworked by the Franciscan theologian Giorgio Benigno Salviati.[48]

   Due to its fully visionary nature, the text of Apocalypsis Nuova cannot be compared with the above-mentioned texts with a construction of exact argumentation by Sixtus IV or Lawrence of Brindisi. However, thanks to his function as the Pope's confessor, Amadeo must have had certain influence over the Pope.[49] The second wave of Amadeo's influence, this time directly on art, came after opening and popularising his text in the milieu in Rome in the 16th century. Thanks to that, we can find Amadeo and Salviati, for example, in Raphael's Disputation of the Holy Sacrament in the Stanze in Vatican.[50] For our Czech artistic milieu, the specific importance lies in the fact that the motif of the Adoration of Christ, to the origination of which he contributed, is situated on the main altar of the Church of the Nativity of Our Lord in Prague's Loreto.

The congregation of the Amadeits ceased to exist in 1568 when all its thirty-nine monasteries were annexed to Franciscan Observants. For the latest information about Amadeo, see D. L. Dias who was the only person who published a critical edition of his text. Domingos L. Dias, *Beato Amadeu. Nova Apocalipse* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2014), 5–9; Rampi, 'La Madonna di Santa Maria della Pace,' 13.

[47] The book is divided into two parts, the first one deals with the issues of faith. The second part deals with the sermons of John the Baptist and Christ. The book also has elements of prophetic texts as it expects coming of a pope 'pastor angelicus' who will restore the church.

[48] The basic work on this topic is Anna Morisi, *L'Apocalypsis Nova. Ricerche sull'origine e la formazione del testo dello pseudo-Amadeo* (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1970); Dias, *Beato Amadeu. Nova Apocalipse.*

[49] The question remains the influence of Amadeo's sister Beatriz de Silva y Meneses, who stayed in the court of Isabella of Portugal in Spain, and in 1484, she established the order of Ordo Immaculatae Conceptionis Francia, 'L'Immacolata Concezione,' 33.

[50] Christoph L. Frommel, 'Tradizione e rinascita nella genesi della Stanza della Segnatura di Raffaello,' *Accademia Raffaello*, 1/2 (2019), 48–51.

6. The Painting of The Immaculate Conception in Prague Loreto

The painting copies the Amadeit composition very faithfully; there is only a shift in the painting style, as the painting originated probably between 1640 and 1663. In the collections of Prague Castle, we can find its model, a painting of the same dimensions originating from the early 17th century.[51] The motif of the Adoration of Christ must have been highly respected in the Loreto, as the altar canvas is older than the current architectonic state of the church. In connection to the Milan church, it is clear that the painting from the main altar in the Loreto church depicts the theme of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. We could argue that this motif was used in the artistic milieu in northern Italy, mainly in the 16th and early 17th centuries. The Prague painting thus does not fit in this wave of 'interest' in the Amadeit motif, and the composition was used here inadvertently. However, below I will try to substantiate that doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is present in the whole complex of Loreto in Prague and the core of this theological issue determined the layout of this pilgrimage place.

The pilgrimage destination of Loreto was established on 3rd June 1626 by countess Benigna Catherine of Lobkowicz, and it was developed into the current form of the complex for more than a hundred years.[52] However, the first stage of the construction and its basic layout were finished as early as 1640. First, Santa Casa was built – a copy of a house from Loreto in Italy where the Annunciation allegedly happened, according to the legend. A small chapel was finished in 1627, but it was consecrated later on 25th March 1631 by Archbishop of Prague Cardinal Ernst Adalbert von Harrach. In the same year, Benigna Catherine of Lobkowicz had the foundations surveyed for the surrounding cloisters,

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[51] The mutual relationship of both paintings has not been explained fully yet. The author deal with the castle painting in more detail in the currently prepared article called *Zapomenuté obrazy Adorace Krista na pražských Hradčanech.*

[52] Archive sources for the theme of the Loreto include mainly the collection of the Capuchin order in the National Archives (ŘK 31), Lobkowicz archives (sign. R 7/43–49) and Capuchin Provincial Library in Prague's Hradčany (here mainly Capuchin Provincial Library, 'Annales Patrum Capucinorum Provinciae Bohemiae'. For a wider insight, see Marek Brčák, 'Kapucínský řád a jeho působení v Čechách a na Moravě (1673–1783)' (Dissertation work, Institute of the Czech History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2019) From the artistic and historic point of view, the most important works are Jan Diviš, *Pražská Loreta* (Prague: Odeon, 1972); Milada Vilímková, 'Stavebně historický průzkum Prahy 1228a.' Block between Loretánská street, Kapucínská street and Loretánské nám. square, No 100, 102.

whose construction started in 1634. In 1640 there is a record in the Annales about the completion of the Loreto house 'into the square',[53] i.e. the completion of the cloisters. Two spires on the side of the big chapel were also completed.[54] From this record, we can infer that it was planned from the very beginning to enclose the Loreto chapel with square cloisters. Although from our perception it is a standard architectonic form for Loreto complexes, older Czech Loreto buildings were not constructed in this layout.[55] We are also informed by this record

Fig. 1: Michal Puhač, drawing of the altarpiece of the Church of the Nativity of the Lord, Prague Loreto

[53] *Annales Patrum Capucinorum Provinciae Bohemiae*, MS, inv. n. 390–412, 1726–1787, p. 63.
[54] Vilímková, 'Stavebně historický průzkum Prahy 1228a,' 11.
[55] Older Loreto chapels: Horšovský Týn, 1584, Jílové u Prahy, 1621, Hájek u Prahy, 1623 (cloisters were added later). Square cloisters of other Baroque places were only constructed later. (Starý Hrozňatov, Bílá Hora, Svatá Hora etc.)

that in 1640 there was a big chapel in this complex, and its location is shown by two towers. Therefore, it was the area of nowadays church which was rebuilt to its current form as late as in the 1730s. There is a contract with the master Hans George Gottwieck from 1660, among others, about the completion of the cloisters, their paving on the sides of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, and the extension of the two side chapels so that their altars were aligned with the line of the cloisters.[56] The contract informs us that the main chapel was consecrated to the Virgin Mary at the very beginning. And the two side chapels of St Francis and St Anthony of Padua were built latest as of 1660. However, the wording of the contract does not exclude the existence of altars inside the cloisters (protruding to the area of the cloisters) at the place of later chapel recesses.

Conclusion

The state of the Loreto complex in 1660s was therefore as follows: in the middle of the complex, there was Santa Casa surrounded by square cloisters. In its western part, there was a little house for the sacristan and the first area of the treasure house. In the eastern part of the cloisters, there was a 'big chapel' of Virgin Mary with an altarpiece painting of the Nativity of Our Lord. In the southern and eastern parts, there were chapels (originally maybe only altars) of St Francis and St Anthony. Based on the above presented examples and a schematic description of Loreto in the 17th century, it is possible to state a hypothesis that the motif of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary was represented not only on the altarpiece painting. In my opinion, this gradually developing theological theme was reflected in the whole complex since the moment of its construction. Adoration of Christ from the altarpiece painting was complemented with the motif of the Annunciation by means of the actual Santa Casa. There is the same correlation as, for example, in the frontispiece of the Franciscan Breviary from Bologna, generally substantiated by A. Galizzi Kroegel. This basic pair is then complemented by the side chapels of St Francis and St Anthony. An analogy for using these two saints in the theme of the

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[56] Vilímková, 'Stavebně historický průzkum Prahy 1228a,' 13. Transcription of the contract by Max Dvořák, *Maria Loretto am Hradschin zu Prag* (Prague: Selbstverlag, 1883), 22. The contract is deposited in the Lobkowitz Archives.

Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is also found in the Padua altar where these two saints accompany the state of the Virgin Mary from both sides. A repeated interconnection of these two persons in the studied motif was noticed by S. Blake McHam. Both these saints were highly respected by Pope Sixtus IV himself; therefore, they were also situated in the Pope's sepulchral chapel consecrated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in the original St Peter's Basilica.[57] The interpretation of the Prague Loreta through the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is based on the above correlations (connection with the Annunciation motif, typical saints, the Jesse tree, the recurring motif of the Amadeit altar). And it indicates that the complex of the Prague Loreto and the layout of its individual parts was created on the basis of a forward-thinking plan following Franciscan and Capuchin (or Amadeit) spirituality.

The high afterwards respect given to the theme of Adoration of Christ in the Loreto environment is also reflected in later works of art. On the door of the golden sanctuary, there is again the motif of the Adoration of Christ. It is also on the Waldstein chalice and Waldstein monstrance, which was funded by the foundations of Marie Margaret Countess of Waldstein.[58] The shaft of the monstrance is formed by a male figure symbolising the Jesse tree. Its crown is decorated with the figures of St Anne and St Joachim. As it was presented above, both are accompanying iconographic symbols of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. The masterpiece processing of this motif in the Loreto environment is in the Diamond monstrance.[59] Its authors, however, had already adopted a new custom how to picture the motif of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary – the shaft of the leg is formed by the figure of the Virgin Mary with twelve stars around her head and a diamond belt (a reference to the Woman of the Apocalypse) standing on the crescent of the moon. From it, the defeated dragon is curling around the leg of the monstrance. Above the Virgin Mary, there is the radiant crown of the monstrance hovering with masterly lightness – it gave this jewel its alternative name of 'Prague Sun'. Above the lunule, i.e. the space for the incarnation of the Son of God, there is a dove of

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[57] Blake Mcham, 'Visualizing the Immaculate Conception,' 847. More examples are stated there.
[58] Loreto treasure, inv. No P-68 and P-70, dated 1721, Diviš, *Pražská Loreta*, 96, 109, 202, 203.
[59] Loreto treasure, inv. No P-300, dated 1696–1699, Diviš, *Pražská Loreta* 80–89, 199.

the Holy Spirit and the figure of God the Father in the crown. He, with his arms spread and a gesture of blessing and protection, looks down at the whole scene beneath. He is therefore fitted here similarly as his location was understood by Donatello. The motif of the Immaculate Conception was thus repeatedly consciously recalled in the environment of Loreta, although its visual representation gradually changed.

However, the above presented complicated iconographic programme of the layout of the Loreto complex in the 17th century is not conceivable without a sufficient intellectual background which was provided by the immaculist ideas developed in the 15th century in the intellectual environment of Padua, Milan, and Rome and used abundantly in the 16th century in art. In my opinion, *Mariale* by Lawrence of Brindisi, i.e. a collection of his later published sermons, is a record of his intellectual scope and knowledge of the theme. So, it could be him or another italian Capuchin who mediated these deep theological thoughts to Prague. The original painting of the Adoration of Christ, which is now deposited in the collections of Prague Castle, originated in the period when St Lawrence was staying in Prague. He could become familiar with the original Amadeits' motif of the Adoration of Christ during his studies or his activity in the monastic order in northern Italy. The fact that he was aware of the interconnection of the theme of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and the biblical text of the Annunciation is proven by his reasoning in his sermons in *Mariale*. An uncertain issue for future research remains the fact whether the layout of the cloister, i.e. in a square shape, as it is explicitly stated in the Annales, is based on the local urban disposition or connected with the remainder of the Pythagorean teaching of Tetractys, which is supposed to refer to the Virgin Mary as a new ark.

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TILL AND KEEP AND GOD'S INDWELLING*

FELIPE DITTRICH FERREIRA

ABSTRACT

This article proposes to restore the understanding of Genesis 1-2 not as an innocent prelude for the Fall, but as the blueprint for the unfolding of God's plan for the created world. In this context, the idea that humankind was given the image of God is articulated with the instructions given by God in paradise: naming the animals (Gn 2:19), tilling and keeping the soil (Gn 2:15), multiplying, and filling and mastering the Earth (Gn 1:28). Such tasks would have the function of guiding the human development towards the likeness of God, while contributing at the same time to Earth's development, according to the model furnished by the garden of Eden, arguably meant to be extended and multiplied. The final objective of such efforts would be to prepare the Earth for God's indwelling. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13), along with the Parable of the Faithful Servant (Matthew 24:42–51; Mark 13:34–37; Luke 12:35–48) could be said to warrant such interpretation.

Keywords
Genesis; Creation; Image of God; Earth; Garden of Eden

In this article, I propose to understand the instructions given to humankind in the book of Genesis – naming the animals (Gn 2:19), tilling and keeping the soil (Gn 2:15), multiplying, and filling and mastering the earth (Gn 1:28) – as a commentary on how the idea of *imago Dei* should be understood and put in practice. I will argue, moreover, that the

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Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13), along with the Parable of the Faithful Servant (Matthew 24:42–51; Mark 13:34–37; Luke 12:35–48), can be understood as a commentary on the human mandate to till and keep the earth under God's supervision but with a good degree of autonomy. Finally, I will try to show how tilling and keeping can be articulated with eschatological hopes.

1. Till and Keep

Irenaeus conceived Adam and Eve as children created to grow into the likeness of God.[1] Other theologians saw things differently. Robert South, in the 17th century, conceived Adam coming 'into the world a philosopher, (…) he could see essences in themselves, (…) consequents yet dormant in their principles, and effects yet unborn in their causes; his understanding could almost pierce into future contingents'.[2] Others held that Adam had not necessarily a more developed intellect but better organs of sensation. Joseph Glanvill, for example, also in the 17th century, argued that, in Adam, 'even the senses, the Soul's windows, were without any spot or opacity', allowing thereby a deeper apprehension of reality, perhaps to the point of making reasoning unnecessary. Peter Harrison notes that some theologians, in the same period, even thought that 'the knowledge of the first man was born with him'.[3] Adam, in this perspective, would have arrived in the world already fully informed about where he was and how he was to live.

That said, if Adam was created perfect, why was he, along with Eve, so easily led to mistake? Simply following logic, we seem forced to conclude that Adam had, at best, the potential for perfection but not perfection in actuality. That is the reasoning proposed by Irenaeus in 'Against Heresies'. He claims that Adam, just created, was still unable to receive the highest gifts from God. Had he received such gifts, he could not contain them. Containing them, he would fatally let them scape.[4] Adam is compared to a baby, for a period able to eat nothing but milk. In Irenaeus' reasoning, God would act in relation to the human being as a mother in relation to her infant:

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[1]   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, chapter 38.
[2]   Apud Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural* Science (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 211.
[3]   Harrison, *The Bible*, 212.
[4]   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, chapter 38.

> For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.[5]

Such perspective helps to understand the tasks presented before Adam and Eve in paradise: naming the animals (Gn 2:19) and tilling and keeping the soil (Gn 2:15), in articulation with the exhortation to multiply and fill and master the earth (Gn 1:28). Such tasks were given to introduce Adam and Eve, as representatives of the human species, into a process of development. By knowing the garden (naming), conserving (keeping) and developing it (tilling), Adam and Eve were to gradually move towards higher levels first, of humanisation, and later, it can be supposed, of deification, as they became ready, step by step, to receive greater gifts from God.

Human development, in this context, should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon within creation. Developing themselves by fulfilling the tasks they were given, Adam and Eve were expected to simultaneously develop the earth, making it adequate for human habitation, with due consideration for the interests of other species, also blessed and commanded to be fertile (Gn 1:22) – and initially, it should be recalled, not intended to serve human dietary needs (Gn 1:29). Eden, in this sense, was a prototype. Once Irenaeus' fundamental insight regarding human development is accepted, it becomes clear that Eden was not just a pleasant place. Paradise had a function, which apparently was that of showing to Adam and Eve how the earth was meant to be. Eden was a model, to be extended and multiplied, as Adam, Eve and their descendants fulfilled the exhortation to fill and master the earth – an idea well understood but often terribly misapplied by the protestant sects that, in the 17th century, saw as their mission to make of the entire world a garden through the colonial expansion of agriculture and other 'arts of civilisation'.[6] Treating work not as a punishment but as divinely-ordained activity, Christians influenced by the reformation well captured the gist of the first two chapters of Genesis, interpreting

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5   Ibid.
6   Harrison, *The Bible*, 239. See also Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 90–91, 125–141.

them not as an innocent prelude for the Fall, but as the blueprint for the unfolding of God's plan for the earth – an idea still worth being explored. Isaiah 45:18 could be said to furnish the main interpretative key for this reading of Genesis:

> For thus said the LORD,
> The Creator of heaven who alone is God,
> Who formed the earth and made it,
> Who alone established it–
> He did not create it a waste,
> But formed it for habitation:
> I am the LORD, and there is none else[7]

Irenaeus illustrates the long and complex process of human development *within* and *with* creation by proposing to understand in a dynamic sense the idea that humans were given the image and likeness of God. The image of God would refer to a potentiality, while the *likeness* to the actualisation of this potentiality.

To better understand this perspective, it is useful to note that the words till (עבד) and keep (שמר), central in the context of God's educational strategy, can be interpreted both in very practical and also in more clearly spiritual terms. In Hebrew, the word עבד – normally translated, in Genesis 2, as 'till' or 'cultivate' – means, more generally, both to work and to serve and can be found not only in the context of economic discussions but also in the context of religious declarations. The word is used, for example, when Jacob discusses with Laban how long he would work to acquire the right to marry Rachel. To serve, in this context, means to *work under someone's orders*, in pragmatic terms, and does not necessarily imply a sincere commitment. The same word, however, is also used, for example, in the commandment '*serve* the LORD your God with all your heart and soul' in Deuteronomy. Serve, therefore, can mean simply to work or, more seriously, to pay

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[7]   The word 'waste' here is a translation of תֹהוּ (Jewish Publishing Society, 1985), also used in Gn 1:2 to describe the initial state of the Earth (וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ) before God created the light and separated light from darkness. Isaiah 45:18 can probably be seen as a commentary on Genesis 1. The fundamental idea here is that 'Yahweh characteristically intends not only to have a world, but to have a certain kind of world, one that generously and gladly attends to the goodness and extravagance of life.' Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997), 158. This theme will be further developed in the fifth section of this article.

allegiance to someone or to some cause. The famous distinction between alienated and non-alienated labour is perhaps useful at this point. It could be suggested that work was not meant to allow or invite such distinction, as work arguably should follow from a 'natural' disposition towards making the world fully inhabitable in a spontaneous and joyful partnership with the Creator. The emergence of inequality and oppression, in the social arena, along with the birth of fear and ambition, in the psychological domain, however, made possible, not to say necessary, the distinction between the fuller and the impoverished sense of עבד (serve/work).

As for שמר, it can have practical applications, such as in Gn 3:24, when angels are placed to the east of Eden in order to 'protect' – in a literal sense, at least in narrative terms – the way that leads to the tree of life, but is more commonly find in the Bible in texts dealing with obedience to God's commandments, such as in 'observe' the Shabbat or 'keep' my covenant. The word can also be found in Gn 4:9, where Cain asks: 'Am I my brother's *keeper*?' Here the word gets perhaps to its most complete set of connotations, although by negation, as it involves, since God's expectations are being addressed, not only protecting, but also nurturing in a spirit of love, friendship, and respect.

Taking into account the different occurrences and connotations of עבד and שמר, Joshua Moritz suggests that 'till and keep' are not entirely adequate translations. In his view, the first humans were created to be 'priests' of creation and not actually to work. Work would enter into the picture later 'as an ironic reversal of man's original purpose'.[8] Originally, '[m]an's life in the garden was to be characterized by worship [as a translation of עבד] and obedience [as a translation of שמר]'[9] – 'he [the first man] was a priest, not merely a worker and keeper of the garden.'[10]

In opposition to this 'pro-clerical' interpretation, which inadvertently seeks to inscribe 'alienation' into the structure of creation, by separating, in the life of the human being, essence from existence, to the detriment of the latter, I suggest that by keeping both levels of meaning, not only the spiritual but also the practical, in relation to עבד and שמר,

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[8]   Joshua Moritz, 'Evolution, the End of Human Uniqueness, and the Election of the Imago Dei,' *Theology and Science* 9, no.3 (2011): 307–339. For the issues mentioned above, see pages 326 and 338.

[9]   Moritz, 'Evolution,' 326.

[10]   John Sailhamer, quoted in Moritz, 'Evolution,' 326.

we can better describe the process that God apparently had in mind when He created the human being not yet perfect. Humans are supposed to grow up and develop, and there is not only a spiritual aspect to this but also a material one. To properly articulate both levels, according to the Chalcedonian model, is the challenge faced by a theologically informed anthropology.

2. *Imago Dei*

Before going further, it is important to examine in more detail how the idea of *imago Dei* appears in the Bible. The first mention of the concept is found in Genesis 1:26–27. There is presented the idea that the human being was made in the image of God and after his likeness, with the implication, made explicit in the text, that human beings are thus entitled to 'rule over' animals, domestic or wild, either inhabiting the sea, the skies or moving over the earth.

The idea is reiterated in Genesis 5:1, in a preface to the list of Adam's descendants: 'This is the record of Adam's line. When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.' Shortly after, in Genesis 5:3, it is said that 'when Adam had lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness after his image, and named him Seth'. It is debatable whether the reference to Adam's image and likeness at this point should be seen as replacing the reference to the likeness of God mentioned before, as if Seth had the image and likeness of his father and not the likeness of God. In my view, it seems that the second reference to image and likeness reinforces the first instead of replacing it.

It will be recalled that, as a result of the Fall, God cursed the soil, making the production of food more toilsome (Gn 3:17–18). Since Adam and Eve were not cursed, there is no reason to believe that the *imago* was lost with the expulsion from paradise. However, as there could be a doubt, Genesis 5:1 confirms that Adam was made in the likeness of God and does not add to this any disclaimer. Adam and Eve left Eden carrying the image of God, not as a man carries something of value in a bag, but as a mother carries a baby. The repetition of this theme in relation to Seth seems to confirm, again in a reassuring way, that although conceived by natural means and not by divine intervention, he inherited the basic qualities given to his father by God.

The situation of Cain after his banishment is different. In that, he was given a 'mark' (Gn 4:15), not in order to be discriminated, but so

that he would not be killed outside Eden, which is perhaps an indication that the image of God, although preserved regardless of the Fall, can be obscured to the point of making the human being unrecognisable and perhaps easily mistaken for something like a wild animal. Cain's reasoning seems to invite such an interpretation. Informed of his punishment, he affirms: 'Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!' (Gn 4:14). The mark he was given in response to this argument arguably had the function of making explicit a hidden quality: Cain's humanity. At the same time, the mark obviously pointed to the existence of a problem, thereby functioning both as a sign of inclusion and exclusion.

The ambiguity of Cain's situation, protected by God but banished from His presence, can also be seen in the subsequent events in his history (Gn 4: 16–17): Cain retained the capacity to have offspring and later built a city. The association of Cain with the emergence of urban life should not be taken as casual information. The editor of Genesis apparently sought to contrast God's creation of a garden with Cain's creation of a city, a point well observed by Abraham Cowley in the 17th century: 'God the first garden made, and the first city Cain.'[11] Cain's retention of the image of God helps explain these developments. The Biblical narrative seems to suggest that Cain was the first who managed to develop the *imago* not towards the likeness of God but towards something else. Able and active but separated from God, Cain should perhaps be considered the patriarch of all attempts to build a purely human world using the God-given human capacity to rule over creation. In this sense, it is very plausible to think of the outcome of Cain's history as a commentary on the process of secularisation, taken as a possibility inscribed in the structure of creation beyond its systematical occurrence at different places and moments.

A further development in the history of *imago Dei* within the Bible can be found in Genesis 9:6. There it is said, when a new social contract is presented at the ending of the Flood: 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, By man shall his blood be shed; For in His image Did God make man.' The *imago*, at this point, is presented as surviving not the expulsion from paradise but the Flood, as if the doubt in relation to the character of the human being had again – and with good

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[11] Harrison, *The Bible*, 236.

reason – resurfaced. At the same time, the establishment of capital punishment shows that the solution found for Cain was now considered insufficient. In the post-diluvian world, murder was thought to erase from its author the image of God instead of making it socially invisible or obscured. Killing as a response to killing therefore became possible.

To focus on the good side of this regression in criminal law, if the *imago* can be lost on occasion, it is a sign that it was certainly preserved, in accordance with the biblical narrative, as a general rule. In fact, in the blessing to Noah (Gn 9:1–7), some of the main lines of the creation account are reiterated, and a fundamental role for the human being is again clearly stated. In Genesis 9:1, as in Genesis 9:7, that is, in the opening and in the closing statements of the reordering of the world after the Flood, the words of Genesis 1:28 can again be heard: 'Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth.'

In fact, the post-diluvian social contract accords the human being even greater powers. While before it was said that the human being would rule over or subdue other species – notions that leave room for 'constructive' interpretations, now it is said, in clearly harsh and instrumental terms, that 'the fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky (…) and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand. Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these.' (Gn 9:2)

This is the moment in which the human being was given the right to treat animals as food. This is the moment, as well, in which, by human initiative, animals began to be used in sacrifices (Gn 8:20).[12] Not by

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[12] See, on this regard, Didier Luciani, *Les animaux dans la Bible*, Cahiers Évangile, no. 183 (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 25: 'Noé force la main à Dieu et, en quelque sorte, l'implique das sa violence, en offrant un sacrifice que celui-ci n'avait jamais demandé, mais qu'il aurait été, de sa part, discourtois de refuser.' Luciani suggests that, after the Flood, God – 'lucide' – decided to accept, apparently in order to regulate it, [la] 'réalité de la violence'. God, at least at this point, would support, in other words, a 'realist' anthropology. Gn 4:4 could be said to inaugurate animal sacrifice in the Bible. Abel, however, arguably made to God an offer of milk, along with a living animal, the first to be born in his flock or the first of a given female sheep. There is no reason to believe that Abel offered God a dead animal as a gift. There is no mention in the account of an altar for sacrifice, for example. Given the interdiction of animal consumption in Gn 1:29-30, it seems very unlikely that animal sacrifice was somehow demanded or authorised by God still in Eden, even more in an implicit and unregulated way. Abel, therefore, probably gave God a living lamb along with a bottle of milk in order to share with the creator, in gratitude, the results of his work. The word חלב, used in Gn 4:4, is inconsistently translated throughout the Old Testament, sometimes as milk, sometimes as fat. The

chance, when the account of the new creation ends, God does not proclaim it good or very good. Paradoxically, the new alliance formed at the end of the Flood is said to include 'all flesh' (Gn 9:17), that is, not only humans but all living beings. This might be one of those cases in which an editor is thought to have intervened in the original text, making it incoherent, in the hope of softening a message considered too harsh.[15]

We should be careful, however, not to introduce supersessionism already in Genesis and should try, above all, to respect the text as it stands. What Genesis 1–11 apparently seeks to demonstrate is that, although 'very good', the world created by God – and left to the 'tilling and keeping' of a divine-like but very problematic gardener – is fragile; 'very good', but easily vulnerable to disfiguration; not fallen, but ambiguous.

That said, two fundamental 'theological facts' presented in Genesis should be fully taken into account: a) God almost regretted creating the world; b) when recreated, the world was not fully restored; it was saved but changed. That Noah and his descendants, after the Flood, became meat eaters (Gn 9:2) and animal sacrificers (Gn 8:20)[14] in contrast with their vegetarian (Gn 1:29), animal-naming ancestors (Gn 2:20) and that

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word appears, for example, in Exodus 33:3 where it is normally translated as milk: 'a land flowing with milk and honey' (ארץ זבת חלב ודבש). If the idea of 'a land flowing with milk' sounds natural in a vision of paradise restored, it should sound even more natural in a description of Eden. A land flowing with fat and honey would certainly be a very strange one! Cain, charged with tilling the soil, also wanted to share with God the results of his work. In fact, Abel and Cain together, one tilling the soil, the other working as a shepherd, were apparently meant to illustrate the main variants of the human vocation on earth, understood as a response to the exhortation to till and keep. The editor of Genesis, however, apparently chose to change the focus of the story at this point, leaving behind the debate about tilling and keeping and bringing into the scene the troubles of human relationships, as if concluding that the main obstacle for proper tilling and keeping lies not in the human relationship with nature but in relationships among humans. A very thoughtful comment on this topic, by Kathy Dunn, can be found in: 'Shepherding All God's Creatures', accessed December 12, 2022, https://www.all-creatures.org/articles/an-tpr-beginning-cain-abel.html. Referring to Gn 4:4, she asks, for example: 'I wonder how this passage would read had we known nothing of the sacrificial system.'

[15] On this topic, see John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), especially the chapter 5, on Ecclesiastes, whose 'original version' is often thought to have been supplemented in order to attenuate a message considered too pessimist and sceptical. According to the 'supplementary hypothesis', notes Barton, 'the original Qoheleth was a work of considerable though not wholly unacceptable skepticism, which had been touched up in places to bring it back within the orthodox fold by the addition of such verses as the conclusion' (p. 63).

[14] On animal sacrifice, see note 14 above.

violence among humans became widespread to the point of apparently requiring the establishment of the death penalty are signs that the world that was meant to be 'very good' and in which God could rest (Gn 2:2), actually became a gloomy and dangerous place, even if yet full of vestiges of former glory, almost demanding full reconstruction.

It is in such a world – a world in which God would have no place to lay his head on (Luke 9:58; Matthew 8:20) – that the history of salvation begins with Abraham's calling.

3. Election

After this brief biblical examination, we can go on to consider some of the implications of the *imago Dei* doctrine. The first main implication concerns the human entitlement to 'rule over' other species while fulfilling the exhortation to fill the earth. The second main implication concerns the regulation of social life. This double implication should be strongly emphasised. Ecological criticism has made it easy to discard *imago Dei* as a dangerous anthropocentric invention. Without ignoring the damage caused by claims of human superiority, it is important to recall that the *imago* also provides the basis for the notion of human dignity and consequently for the establishment of fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, although, as seen above, not without some ambiguity. The *imago Dei*, in other words, is a package which needs to be interpreted as it is. Picking and choosing from the biblical text whatever might seem more appropriate at different times and in different places in accordance with often volatile ideological preferences creates the risk of breaking carefully constructed arrangements within the biblical text.

That said, even those interested in preserving the *imago Dei* doctrine should admit that there is not much in the scriptures favouring a very high view of humankind. Even though humans are said to bear the image of God and potentially or in actuality His likenesses, what we see throughout the Bible is not very encouraging. First, there is the Fall; then there is Cain. A few generations later, we are told that God 'regretted that He had made man on earth', since 'every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time' (Gn 6:5). The Flood, along with the new covenant, could be expected, as discussed, to mark a new beginning, but we are soon told the story of Babel (Gn 11:1-9), in which human ingenuity is equated with hubris. Afterwards, in

despite of many signs of progress in the history of salvation – the liberation from bondage in Egypt, above all – we find in the Deuteronomy not only unsettling transgressions but also disturbing attempts at correction of condemned behaviour. Death by stoning, for example, is mentioned as appropriate punishment more than a few times.

In other words, while it is true that by the concession of God's image and likeness humankind was given, according to Genesis, singular rights over the whole of creation along with singular potentialities, we should be careful not to conclude from this that the Bible furnishes a clear foundation for claims of human superiority. At best, the Bible presents the human being as ambiguous – capable of correction, sometimes righteous, often heroic, but always prone to mistake. To mention only one example, of all people, Aaron was the one putting together a golden calf (Ex 32:4). It is not surprising, therefore, that on a few occasions, *non-human* creation is actually presented in the Bible as superior to human creation, at least in the sense of being able to recognise God's glory, as when Jesus says, in Luke 19:40, that were his disciples not to praise him as God's anointed, 'the stones would cry out', likely not only in God's praise but also in protest against human blindness.[15]

This theme, although from a different starting point, was developed persuasively by Joshua Moritz. Taking into account the lack of scientific support for the claims of human superiority, he argues that the *imago Dei* doctrine can only be maintained if understood as 'election'. The *imago*, in this sense, would not be related to any qualities, physical, mental, or moral, that the human being could be said to possess. It would follow exclusively from God's sovereign will. The *imago*, therefore, should not be read through the lens of 'salvation through works'. In the same way, the *imago* should not be seen through the lens of 'salvation through faith', as if only religious or righteous people would have the image of God. The *imago* should not be seen as an achievement or a reward but as a gift and a calling.

To explain his view on the election, Moritz takes as a model the choice of Israel by God to carry out His 'salvation project', noting that 'those who are elected are not chosen because they are "the greatest" or

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[15] On this topic, see David Horrell and Dominic Coad, '"The Stones Would Cry Out" (Luke 19:40): A Lukan Contribution to a Hermeneutics of Creation's Praise,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 1 (Feb. 2011): 29–44.

inherently more worthy than others, but rather as a result of mysterious acts of divine love and grace.'[16] Elected people – or people convinced of their own election – can probably actually improve in many aspects, in so far as the election often introduces the elected into a process of betterment. We could recall in this context a phrase attributed to Napoleon: 'a man becomes his uniform'. That said, one should be careful not to invert the proper relation of causality. God does not necessarily choose the best, but those chosen are certainly expected to become better. When Jesus said 'out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham' (Luke 3:8; Matthew 3:9), he was praising not stones but God in an attempt to remind his audience that the election should not be transformed into a motive for self-indulgence. This is confirmed by what Jesus immediately adds: 'The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire' (Matthew 13:10; Luke 3:9).

In the Hebrew Bible, therefore, as well as in the New Testament on a different scale, the election is presented as a mission in the context of the history of salvation to which God calls potentially everyone but concretely, for mysterious reasons, specific individuals and groups, demanding from the chosen ones nothing but full conversion and dedication to God's project under penalty of destruction, as stated most emblematically in Deuteronomy: 'I set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity' (30:15); 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse' (30:19). Therefore, if the image of God in the human being should be understood in terms of election, we should almost fear it in addition to taking it as a badge of honour.

In Moritz's words,

> election in the Biblical understanding relates to a people whom God has chosen in the midst of history for a special purpose within the wider context of God's design. This purpose of election is (…) defined not in terms of privilege, but rather for the sake of service.[17]

Trying to connect God's project for Israel and God's project for the broader world, Moritz argues that one aspect of service is 'to represent

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16   Moritz, 'Evolution,' 321.
17   Ibid.

God to "the many"'.[18] He recalls, in this context, Genesis 12:3, in which it is said that through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed. He explains that 'the many' for Israel 'are the gentile nations to whom Israel as God's elect is to bear God's light and justice'.[19]

To say, however, that the elected should strive to help the non-elected is certainly not going far enough, in so far as a fundamental distinction among humans is thereby preserved, while God's freedom to choose different partners to carry out his salvation project is not fully acknowledged. The way forward is shown in two passages of the Hebrew Bible, persuasively analysed by Walter Brueggemann, in which Israel's monopolistic claims over God are broken. The first is Amos 9:7:

> Are you not like the Ethiopians to me,
> O people of Israel? says the Lord.
> Did I not bring Israel from the land of Egypt,
> and the Philistines from Caphtor
> and the Arabians from Kir?

The second passage can be found in Isaiah 19:23–25:

> On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people and Assyria the work of my hands and Israel my heritage.'

In the first passage, Israel remains fully under God's protection and guidance, but God's attention is made available as well for other peoples. In the second passage, the broadening of God's purview is made more explicit. The last verse, notes Brueggemann,

> takes up three special names for Israel that are rooted it its peculiar and privileged relationship with Yahweh: 'my people', 'the work of my hands' and 'my heritage'. These three names, all heretofore assigned exclusively to Israel, are now distributed across the Fertile Crescent, assigned to people

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[18] Ibid., 322.
[19] Ibid.

who have been a great threat to Israel and a great vexation to Yahweh. In this daring utterance we witness the process by which other peoples are redesignated to be Yahweh's chosen peoples so that, taken paradigmatically, all peoples become Yahweh's chosen peoples.[20]

Although with some ambiguity, Moritz embraces this perspective, arguing that Israel arrived at the conception of *imago Dei* as well as the concept of divine election through the 'democratization of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology'.[21] He notes that the idea of the image of God, coupled with the idea of divine election, was originally applied in Egypt or Assyria to individual authorities or entire dynasties in order to justify the exercise of power. Against this background, the application of the *imago Dei* concept to the entire humankind was an extremely bold movement, which in many ways actually created the human being, at least as currently understood: as universally endowed with inherent dignity and rights.

The conception of election applied to the people of Israel might seem, in comparison, less revolutionary. To understand the different ways in which *imago* and election were democratised, it seems necessary to introduce history in the debate. The *imago*, as presented in Genesis, was apparently conceived in order to transcend history, that is, in order to protect the fundamental status of the human being from fluctuations in power and politics.[22] Election, on the other hand, was made to stand right in the middle of history. This point is well presented by Moritz. He notes that 'in the Biblical concept of election it is clear that YHWH's electing is not contained in some divine decree that exists beyond time (…) but rather takes shape in the historical activity

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[20] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 522.

[21] Moritz, 'Evolution,' 329. See also Konrad Schmid, *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2018), 431–432 and also p. 219: 'Gen 1 transfers the 'image of God' – traditionally the prerogative of the kings – to all humanity. Not the king, but rather the kingly person is a reality of creation.'

[22] Brueggemann notes that Genesis 1:1–2:4a was likely composed in the period of the Babylonian exile. Presenting God as 'serenely and supremely in charge', able to create simply by the power of his word, the text offered to displaced and oppressed Israel a 'contrast-world', creating space for the irruption of hope and courage in despite of dire circumstances. See *Theology of the Old Testament*, 153 and also 533 ('counter experience of creation'). The interpretation of the *imago* presented above is convergent with this idea.

of divine redemption that is grounded in the history of YHWH with his people.'[25]

The election was perhaps strategically contained to a single people at a given point in time and space in order to be made fully operational. In so far as election demands service, it apparently requires organised effort and, therefore, some degree of cohesion and direction, which might be easier to achieve within a single people. That said, to make of biblical Israel a model of cohesion and direction would be going too far, and although it might be a good exercise to speculate about God's preferences, it is foolish to suppose one can fully understand God's decision-making process. What seems clear is that election is very likely open-ended, 'rather than [being] a matter of exclusivism and particularity'.[24] It has, therefore, 'an inclusive and universalistic tendency'[25] – an inclination that does not exclude, it should be emphasised, possible occasional concentrations at certain historical junctures.

4. The Horizon of Creation

Moritz delves into questions that are beyond the reach of this article. Here, I propose to retain his understanding of *imago* as election while refusing, for example, the idea that humans, fulfilling the function of 'priests of creation', should act to 'elevate' animals towards higher metaphysical levels, in analogy with the way Israel is expected to guide other peoples towards God.[26] I agree with the idea that, on occasion, the human being can, in Eucharistic fashion, 'reconcile and harmonize the noetic and the material realms, to bring them to unity, to spiritualize the material, and to render manifest all the latent capacities of the created order',[27] as proposed, for example, by Kallistos Ware. But to make of this the human role in creation, it is, in my view, to go in a dangerous direction. There are many situations in which human actions

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[25] Moritz, 'Evolution,' 321.
[24] Ibid., 322.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 324–325: 'Both the Old Testament authors and those of intertestamental Judaism develop a picture of Israel as God's true humanity, "aligning with Adam, and the Gentiles with the beasts over whom Adam rules".'; 'According to the Genesis narrative, the nations in relation to Israel parallel the animals whom Adam is called to both serve and rule'; 'as Israel holds a place of honor among the races, so humans occupy a place of honor among the animals'; 'as the nations are structurally equated with the animals, "the High priest ruling over Israel is like Adam ruling over all creation"'.
[27] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018), 70.

are able to reveal extraordinary latent capacities in creation, such as when pieces of wood are transformed into a musical instrument or when wheat is transformed into bread. However, there are also innumerable questionable or clearly harmful transformations. The human being, therefore, should not look at the created world as a deposit of raw material waiting for 'reconcilement' with the spiritual world or development in simple empirical terms. As argued by Richard Bauckham, there are many cases in which humans are likely to better fulfil their regal *imago Dei* role by just letting creation be. 'All creatures', he argues, 'bring glory to God simply by being themselves and fulfilling their God-given roles in God's creation.'[28] They lack nothing, in other words, and have no need for human mediation in order to reach God. That said, the recognition of the fundamental goodness of creation does not preclude careful and balanced development within the limits assigned to the human being (Gn 11:6). Against excessive ambition, it seems important to remind that likeness and identity are not the same thing and that the king's representative, however important, should not be mistaken for the king – one of the lessons of the Book of Esther. God's reply to Job – in the Anthropocene, more than ever – remains valid: 'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?' (Job 38:4).

The commandment to till and keep might help, once again, to elucidate what is the proper human role within creation. Till and keep can be read as a single commandment, in the sense that one instruction requires the other. It might be a reminder, in the most literal sense, that it is not enough to sow seeds; it is necessary to ensure plant development through nurturing and protection. Ibn Ezra, with commendable concreteness, interpreted 'keep it' in the context of Gn 2:15 as 'to guard the garden so that no animals enter therein and befoul it'.[29] That said, it is normally possible, regarding the Biblical text, to conciliate concrete and specific interpretations with much broader ones. In this sense, till and keep might also be read as pointing to different but articulated ways to look at and deal with creation. *Till* opens creation for development, while *keep* suggests a conservative attitude. The combination of perspectives results in a balanced approach, which could be summarised in the following commandments: bring forward hidden

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[28] Richard Bauckham, 'Joining Creation's Praise of God,' *Ecotheology* 7 (2002): 45–59, 47.

[29] *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, translated and annotated by H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah Pub., 1988–2004), available at: https://www.sefaria.org.

potential, but do not force creation to go beyond its natural inclinations; develop creation to improve it, not to disfigure it. Till and keep, understood as guiding principles for human action, can be read as a call for action and, at the same time, as a warning against hubris.

Such interpretation should not be read as interdicting a fuller Eucharistic expectation. The day will come in which God will dwell in creation (Revelation 21:3), taking incarnation to its fullest possible extent. Men and women are certainly expected to be ready for this day, as illustrated by the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25: 1–13), as well as by the Parable of the Faithful Servant (Matthew 24:42–51; Mark 13:34–37; Luke 12:35–48). Both parables can be interpreted as illustrating the need to endure in hope, a fundamental teaching which, however, can be misread as favouring a passive attitude. Two other parables can help to understand more clearly what being ready implies: the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27) and the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6–9). Both can be interpreted as a direct comment on the exhortation to till and keep, with a strong emphasis on the productive side of the equation. Connecting Genesis and the Book of Revelation, I propose to understand the need for results which these parables illustrate as pointing to the obligation to prepare the earth, through tilling and keeping, for God's indwelling, that is, for the eternal Sabbath.

At this point, an important caveat is necessary. If the garden of Eden can be considered a prototype for the development of creation, there is no doubt that there is a strong ecological aspect in the process of preparation of the earth for God's indwelling. That said, taking care of the part of creation each person is given does not necessarily need to be interpreted solely in ecological terms. A people can be given land, parents are given children, teachers are given students, an authority is given a role in public life, a doctor is given patients. All given something to till and keep might at any moment be visited by the Lord. Creation, therefore, should not be identified with nature exclusively or understood in opposition to civilisation. As observed by Walter Brueggemann, 'Yahweh characteristically intends not only to have a world, but to have a certain kind of world, one that generously and gladly attends to the goodness and extravagance of life.'[50] Such goodness and extravagance require and encompass all creatures. We might call this

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[50] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 158. Also quoted above, see footnote no. 9.

ecology, but with the risk of transforming the beating heart of the Bible into just another branch of theology.

Creation was meant to offer all creatures a homely environment, as Psalm 104 beautifully illustrates, with references not only to human interests but also to the needs of animals and plants:

> You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
> they flow between the hills,
> giving drink to every wild animal;
> the wild asses quench their thirst.
> By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
> they sing among the branches.
> From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
> the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
> You cause the grass to grow for the cattle
> and plants for people to cultivate,
> to bring forth food from the earth
> and wine to gladden the human heart,
> oil to make the face shine
> and bread to strengthen the human heart.
> The trees of the field are watered abundantly,
> the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
> In them the birds build their nests;
> the stork has its home in the fir trees.
> The high mountains are for the wild goats;
> the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.
> You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
> the sun knows its time for setting.
> You make darkness, and it is night,
> when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
> The young lions roar for their prey,
> seeking their food from God.
> When the sun rises, they withdraw
> and lie down in their dens.
> People go out to their work
> and to their labor until the evening. (Ps 104: 10–23)

In this Psalm, we see humans treated almost just as another species, daily receiving God's gifts and using them to build their lives: bringing

forth food from the earth, making bread for sustenance, wine for joy, and even oil apparently to be used as cosmetics. The quotidian, down to its smallest aspects, is treated as a clear sign of the continuous presence of the Lord. God's attentive care encompasses all creation, with humans and other creatures living side by side. There is hardly any space in this perspective for the understanding of humans as 'priests of creation'. What Psalm 104 – 'the fullest and most extensive Israelite witness to creation'[31] – shows is humans modestly going out to work and doing their labour until the evening.

Is that modest role compatible with the idea that humans should work to prepare the earth for God's indwelling? To answer this question, it might be necessary to recall that ordinariness is very often misleading. Psalm 104 describes a rich and varied world where there is space for a multitude of species thriving under God's protection. Humankind contributes to such exuberance by knowing its place and respecting the space of other species. *Imago Dei*, in this context, can be seen in the capacity to make room for others, as well as in the fulfilment of the daily duties that keep the world going around. Is that enough to make the world the dwelling place of the living God?

5. Incarnation

As already observed, the role of humankind is to be ready. Being ready includes enduring in hope (Matthew 25: 1–13; Matthew 24:42–51; Mark 13:34–37; Luke 12:35–48) and 'investing' God's gifts in order to increase the amount of goodness in the world (Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27; Luke 13:6–9). It can be hoped that God will accept the fruits of human labour as a pleasant offer, which God himself perhaps might be happy to personally receive, thereby entering, to some extent, into the domain of creation.[32] God, in such perspective, can be seen at least as a visitor, able to get in and out of creation without ceasing to be

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[31] Ibid., 530.
[32] Here an analogy could be proposed with Pope Francis' understanding of prayer: 'When we pray courageously, the Lord gives us the grace, but He also gives us Himself in the grace: the Holy Spirit, that is, Himself! The Lord never gives or sends a grace by mail: never! He brings it Himself! What we ask for is a little bit like… it is the envelope that grace is wrapped in. But the true grace is Him, Who comes to bring it to me. It's Him. Our prayer, if it is courageous, receives what it asks for, but also that which is more important: the Lord.' (Pope's message at the morning Mass at Casa Santa Marta, October 10, 2013).

transcendent, as shown, for example, in Gn 18:1–15, when Abraham receives God as a guest.

Going further, it would be possible to take the Priestly doctrine of divine presence in the temple as a model for God's hope for a permanent presence in the entire creation. In that case, the earth would have to be treated as a temple, not only in the sense of being preserved 'as created' but also in the sense of being prepared and adorned for God's indwelling. Although the idea of treating creation as a temple involves the risk of subjecting the understanding of God's indwelling here to the criticism traditionally applied to cultic practices – according to which cultic activity might be seen as 'primitive, magical, manipulative',[35] the Priestly concern with 'order, symmetry, coherence, and dignity – all of which bespeak a certain beauty'[34] – can certainly guide, in general terms, human endeavours if such endeavours are to be thought as able to contribute to the coming of God – a 'demanding agent, whose presence', at least according to the Priestly view, 'is not trivial, incidental, or ad hoc'.[35]

Whatever the case might be, no attempt at mediating God's presence would suffice were it not for God's willingness to join creation, the topic of the concluding remarks of this article.

Simon Oliver suggests that 'the universe was created so that God might become incarnated'.[36] This position implies a fundamental correction in the common understanding of God's incarnation. If the incarnation is understood as reaffirming the goodness of creation, descent must be seen 'not [as] some kind of unfortunate necessity occasioned by human sin and suffering' but almost as a logical development.[37] Creation, in this view, would be 'theophanic and revelatory', and Christ's coming would have the objective of confirming 'the theophanic nature of creation, and [intensifying it] by means of a new light'.[38]

Along somewhat similar lines, Jurgen Moltmann suggests that God's indwelling is not only a function of salvation or judgement but

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[33] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 651.

[34] Ibid., 665.

[35] Ibid., 663.

[36] Simon Oliver, 'Analogy, Creation and Descent in Cusa and Aquinas,' in *Participation et vision de Dieu chez Nicolas de Cues*, edited by Isabelle Moulin (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2017), 125–142, 141.

[37] Ibid., 139.

[38] Ibid., 139.

the consequence, among other things, of God's delight in creation.[39] God's delight is shown most clearly in the refrain of Genesis 1: 'and God saw that is was good.' 'In this remarkable and recurring phrase', explains Terence Fretheim, 'God responds to the work, making evaluations of it. (…) This evaluative move (as with naming and blessing) means that God remains involved with the creation once it has been brought into being. God sees the creature, experiences what has been created, and is affected by what is seen.'[40] Moltmann shares this perspective, noting that 'creating the world is something different from causing it'.[41] *Causing* the world implies a number of one-sided initiatives: making, preserving, maintaining, and perfecting, for example. *Creating*, on the other hand, implies a degree of mutuality better expressed in verbs like indwelling, sympathising, participating, accompanying, enduring, delighting, and glorifying.[42] Such verbs challenge the division between immanence and transcendence and open up the possibility of a more fluid relationship between heaven and earth. Moltmann goes so far as to suggest that 'in the kingdom of Glory (…) the Creator's distance from those he has created will be ended through his own indwelling in his creation', immediately adding that 'the difference between Creator and creature will not disappear'.[43] The Sabbath, understood as a 'foretaste of the world to come',[44] would offer glimpses into this moment.

In the Sabbath, Moltmann notes, God, resting 'in face of his works (…) begins to "experience" the beings he has created (…), he "feels" the world; he allows himself to be affected'.[45] Eventually, he 'adopts the community of creation as his own milieu. In his rest he is close to the movement of them all.'[46] How can such closeness be explained? Should not God's infinity drive him away from his finite creation? Moltmann proposes to explain God's intimacy with creation on the Sabbath arguing that 'the sabbath of God's creation already contains in itself the

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[39] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 76 and 311.
[40] Terence E. Fretheim, 'The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,' in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 36.
[41] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 14.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 64.
[44] Ibid., 276.
[45] Ibid., 279.
[46] Ibid.

redemptive mystery of God's indwelling in his creation.'[47] The Sabbath, in other words, would anticipate the incarnation, as well as God's final indwelling, described in the Book of Revelation. How to understand the idea of anticipation is an open question. It would be possible to imagine, in highly speculative terms, that God makes use of the Sabbath, as if intrigued by the potentiality of matter, to think about new ways to conciliate transcendence and immanence. How far, God might wonder, is it possible to take the 'contraction of the infinite'?[48] The endless multiplication of beauty in the world might indicate that God never ceases to do theophanic experiments, looking to manifest himself in ever more clear ways – *respecting while expanding the limits of materiality.*[49] Such a perspective could help explain how water and stones were somehow transformed into flowers or butterflies throughout the evolutionary process. The movement towards lightness in evolution could be interpreted as indicating the ever-greater compatibility between matter and spirit in the created world.

Speculations apart, what seems clear is that the incarnation can and probably should be seen 'as a normative spiritual movement [rather] than as an isolated moment',[50] as defended by John Chryssavgis. In this perspective, based on the orthodox tradition, 'God at all time and in all things wills to work a divine incarnation. The Word assuming flesh two thousand years ago is only one – though arguably the last, the most unique, and most formative – in a series of incarnations or theophanies.'[51] Chryssavgis adds that, in the orthodox tradition, 'the incarnation is considered as part of the original creative plan, and not simply as a response to the human fall. It is perceived not only as God's revelation to humanity but primarily as a revelation of the true nature of humanity and the world.'[52] In this sense, notes the orthodox theologian, 'creation is a continuous process, where the energies of the incarnate divine Word are manifest throughout creation in time and space' with 'cosmological', therefore, 'not simply historical significance'.[53]

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[47] Ibid., 280.
[48] Oliver, 'Analogy,' 5.
[49] There might in such dynamism an aspect of play, a point explored by François Euvé in *Penser la création comme jeu* (Paris: Cerf, 2000).
[50] John Chryssavgis, *Creation as Sacrament: Reflections on Ecology and Spirituality* (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 100.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 101.

If that is true, humankind is not alone in tilling and keeping. God, as well, remains involved in the creation, working to make of the entire world a proper dwelling place, capable not only of sustaining life in abundance but also of receiving God's glory. At this point, the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13) can again be instructive. The virgins are warned to remain prepared for the arrival of the bridegroom. If the bridegroom is the incarnated God, this parable can be said to symbolise the marriage between heaven and earth. The image of marriage helps explain how God and creation will live together: a difference will remain, but God and creation will grow closer and closer. The challenge of conciliating immanence and transcendence is likely to remain, but new solutions are also likely to be found, with theophanies revealing God in sensible forms in ever clearer ways. A garden-like universe, in this context, can be expected to gradually take shape with God and creation engaged together in the blissful task of exploring and bringing forward the infinite potentialities of a 'very good' world (Gn 1:31).

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THE DIVINE CHARACTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUTIES: A THEOLOGICAL ENQUIRY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BORDER REGIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC*

PETR JANDEJSEK

ABSTRACT

The context of the article is the call by Pope Francis expressed in *Fratelli tutti* to extend fraternity towards people on the margins. The discourse on human rights is proposed as an appropriate – though by no means self-evident – tool for theology to use in order to respond to the challenge of poverty. The article discusses the use of human rights in theology against the background of the situation of poor border areas of the Czech Republic, which are considered to suffer from injustice. It is argued that, under current socio-economic conditions, it is extremely difficult for people living in these regions to make free and responsible decisions. The article confirms that human rights, e.g., social and economic rights, can be convincingly based on a theological view of the human person. 'Divine rights' have their counterpart in 'divine duties', i.e., duties resulting from biblical faith in God the Liberator. Moreover, the Gospel shows that works of mercy or works of justice are eschatologically significant. Finally, it argues that human rights not only allow Christians to share with people of other faiths and without faith the service to justice in the world but are even a possible expression of their own mission to work for the coming of the Kingdom.

Keywords

Theology; Poverty; Human rights; Social and economic rights; Czech border regions

In his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis presents Saint Francis of Assisi as one who 'walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters'.[1] In our time, the Pope calls for 'the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women'.[2] In continuity with his entire pontificate, Francis highlights the reality of people at the margins, our brothers and sisters, who have limited or no chances of a good life. Despite the rhetoric of universality both in the Church and in political and economic proclamations, the Pope suspects that we still see the world with blind spots, effectively proving our language of universality to be vacuous. This is where Francis' effort to create space for hitherto hidden corners and layers of human reality and for the renewal of brotherhood originates. His call also includes theology.[3]

In some currents of theology, such as liberation theology, people on the periphery have been placed at the heart of theological reflection. Jon Sobrino from El Salvador recalls the bishop and poet Pedro Casaldáliga's saying, 'everything is relative except for God and hunger'.[4] Strangely enough, these two absolutes are linked: God decided to be close to the poor and hungry. In order to illuminate this divine act, Sobrino uses a biblical nuptial metaphor: 'There is a great temptation to separate them, or at least to keep them at a prudential distance from each other. But although we try, it is not easy: "What God has joined together" – and He did it by joining Himself with the poor, the weak, and the suffering – "let no man try to separate".'[5] This is what liberation theologians label 'the preferential option for the poor'. In a sense, it is this divine indwelling with the poor that Pope Francis rehabilitates as a focal point for theology. Unless the poor become central, theology is

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[1] Francis, *Encyclical letter* Fratelli tutti *on the fraternity and social friendship*, 2020, 2, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html.

[2] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 8. From a number of comments on *Fratelli tutti*, I would like to draw attention in particular to Kristin E. Heyer, 'Walls in the Heart: Social Sin in *Fratelli tutti*,' *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 19, no. 1 (2022): 25–40, which is relevant to the context of this article.

[3] Francis, *Address at the meeting on the theme 'Theology after* Veritatis gaudium *in the context of the Mediterranean'*, Naples, 21 June 2019.

[4] Jon Sobrino, 'Epilogue,' in *Getting the Poor Down from the Cross. Christology of Liberation*, ed. José Maria Vigil (www.servicioskoinonia.org/LibrosDigitales, 2007), 305–306.

[5] Sobrino, 'Epilogue,' 306.

endangered by being academically distant, ecclesially closed, or falsely spiritual in an alienating sort of way.

This article enquires whether the language of human rights is an appropriate tool for theology, one which responds to the challenge of poverty and social disintegration. It picks up what Pope Francis suggests in *Fratelli tutti* 22. There, he makes use of human rights to point out persistent social and economic inequality:

> By closely observing our contemporary societies, we see numerous contradictions [to human rights] that lead us to wonder whether the equal dignity of all human beings, solemnly proclaimed seventy years ago, is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every situation. In today's world, many forms of injustice persist, fed by reductive anthropological visions and by a profit-based economic model that does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings. While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violated.[6]

It cannot be said that the Pope champions the language of human rights. But he does not hesitate to use it either, especially in his analysis of social reality.[7]

Even in this article, the issue will not be first and foremost about human rights, not even about human rights in relation to religion. What is at stake is human suffering, which is caused by social inequalities and legitimised by various ideologies. Nevertheless, it seems useful to indicate some basic positions that have emerged from the rich debate surrounding theology and human rights in recent decades. There are theologians that strictly distinguish between Christian worldviews and secular human rights. Petr Gallus claims that 'in the concept of human

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[6] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 22.

[7] It was argued that human rights are not the Pope's main key to naming the problems of poverty and human relatedness: 'It is not so much that he has dropped human rights as that he is more interested in structural problems that individual rights do not solve and often perpetuate. (…) Even human rights can be used as a justification for an inordinate defence of individual rights or the rights of the richer peoples.' Samuel Moyn, 'Pope Francis Has Given Up on Human Rights: That's a Good Thing,' *The Washington Post*, 17 Sept. 2015. Over against Moyn, Jodok Troy believes that Francis's pontificate did not fundamentally change the approach to human rights. In line with his precursors, Pope Francis' 'notion of human rights focuses on a collective conceptualization of human rights.' Jodok Troy, 'The Papal Human Rights Discourse: The Difference Pope Francis Makes,' *Human Rights Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Feb 2019): 66–90, 67.

rights, Christianity (…) meets itself, but precisely in a secularized form, i.e. without God.'[8] Therefore human rights stand ungrounded, 'blowing in the wind'. Tracey Rowland is even more disturbed: 'Each time "Christians adopt one of the internationalized languages of modernity, they contribute to the social marginalization of their own narrative tradition".'[9] Other theologians see human rights in greater proximity to Christianity. Linda Hogan writes,

> [t]he language and concept of human rights did not emerge from Christianity directly. The initial impetus was secular. (…) the Church reacted against the secular origin of human rights and was initially quite hostile to the concept. Yet many of the ideas which were central to human rights thinking made their way into the political arena directly from Christianity.[10]

Some thinkers trace biblical roots of human rights even more explicitly: 'If we look at the period of the birth of the modern world, at personalities like Hobbes, Milton and Locke in England or the founding fathers in America, we find that the book with which they had a dialogue was not Plato or Aristotle, but the Hebrew Bible.'[11] Still, other theologians are aware of 'the limitations of a secular human rights paradigm standing alone'[12] and call for a human rights culture as a presupposition for human rights to be effective. Such a culture is typically provided by religion, which suggests that 'religion and human rights need to be brought into a closer symbiosis'.[13] However, if the concept of the universality of human rights is to gain a higher degree

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[8]   Petr Gallus, 'Lidská práva a křesťanství,' *Křesťanská revue* 89, no. 2 (2022): 24–27, 26.

[9]   Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), 150. Quoted in Linda Hogan, *Keeping Faith with Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 2.

[10] Linda Hogan, *Human Rights* (London: Cafod, 1998), 28. A similar position is hold by Jiří Hanuš, 'Úvodní poznámky,' in *Křesťanství a lidská práva*, ed. Jiří Hanuš (Brno: CDK, 2002), 11–54, 14–15.

[11] David Novák, 'Lidská práva náleží všem bez rozdílu,' *Křesťanská revue* 89, no. 2 (2022): 2–4, 2. However, it is appropriate to listen to the warning by Samuel Moyn: 'If a historical phenomenon can be made to seem like an anticipation of human rights, it is interpreted as leading to them in much the way church history famously treated Judaism for so long, as a proto-Christian movement simply confused about its true destiny.' Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 6.

[12] John Witte, Jr., 'Introduction,' in *Christianity and Human Rights. An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8–43, 10.

[13] Witte, 'Introduction,' 12.

of legitimacy, the culture or better cultures of human rights cannot be nourished by Christianity alone. John Witte notices that 'the process of religious engagement of human rights is now under way in Christianity, Islamic, Judaic, Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, and Traditional communities around the world'.[14] A particular attempt in this direction is Hans Küng's initiative world ethos, which Pavel Hošek describes as a 'set of principles [that] corresponds to the principles and starting points of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, but unlike it, it gives these principles a religious justification and, in this sense, also offers religious reasons for efforts to defend human rights'.[15]

While this article draws on the insights of those who see human rights in proximity to Christianity, its argument is more down to earth. If the language of human rights proves to be a useful instrument for theology, it should be used, even if in the future we may discover better ways of expressing the subject.[16] In accordance with Linda Hogan, I keep faith in human rights in theology.[17] I also value Witte's remark that in spite of criticism of human rights – in many ways fitting and useful – we need not abandon the human rights paradigm altogether, 'particularly, when no viable alternative global forum and no viable alternative universal faith is yet at hand'.[18] Witte also points to the disdain for the genius and sacrifice of the many human rights advocates in proposals to dismiss the human rights paradigm. He refers to the experience of those who fought and fight for human rights. I find this point crucial. There are valuable stories of individuals and communities related to human rights. It is important to listen to their voices. It is at this level that Christians and others can join for action and reflection.[19] Anna Šabatová, a former Czech

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[14] Witte, 'Introduction,' 13.

[15] Pavel Hošek, 'Světový étos: náboženská motivace k hájení lidských práv,' *Křesťanská revue* 89, no. 2 (2022): 13-16, 14.

[16] Here I am approaching the position of Moyn, who emphasises the contingency of human rights: 'Human rights have to be treated as a human cause, rather than one with the long-term inevitability and moral self-evidence that common sense assumes (…) But this also means that human rights are not so much an inheritance to preserve as an invention to remake – or even leave behind – if their program is to be vital and relevant in what is already a very different world than the one into which it came so recently.' Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 9.

[17] Hogan, *Keeping Faith.*

[18] Witte, 'Introduction,' 40.

[19] Let me share an illustrative story: During my work at the Prague Social Services Centre a few years ago, I experienced inspiring cooperation among several very diverse social organisations: an institution established by the Prague municipality, several charities belonging to various churches, and a humanistically focused non-conformist

Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsman), recalls that her experience of prison, where she found herself for political reasons as a young woman (the experience of the absence of personal freedom, humiliation, the injury to human freedom), as well as, later, the community of people around the Charter 77 initiative, continued to determine her life.[20] Hogan confirms the role of human rights groups in constituting the very notion of rights when she speaks about 'a prominent role for the lived experiences of communities of solidarity in the articulation of what these rights consist in as well as how they can best be secured'.[21] I dare say that someone who has experienced being a victim or a defender of victims of rights violations is intrinsically connected to human rights and has a feeling for human rights. For such a person – and for such a theologian, the language of human rights comes 'naturally'.

In this article, I would like to follow the methodology proposed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* 50. It tries to avoid a 'diagnostic overload' free from applicable methods of treatment as well as 'a purely sociological analysis which would aim to embrace all of reality by employing an allegedly neutral and clinical method'. Both play a role, yet more important is 'an evangelical discernment'.[22] I begin with a description of the socio-economic situation of people living on the margins of contemporary Czech society. This will serve to illustrate the reductive anthropological visions and profit-based economic model that exploits and discards human beings that Pope Francis writes about in *Fratelli tutti*. The main focus will be on social and economic rights, or the rights set out in Articles 22 through 27 of the *Universal Declaration*. They relate in particular to what people are entitled to as members of society, such as an adequate standard of living, health care, food, clothing, housing, and education.[25] However, considering the indivisibility and interdependence of rights, even social and economic

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association. All these institutions were united by a common interest in the right of homeless people to survive the winter. Although we did not discuss human rights at that time, it was a functional principle behind our cooperation.

[20] Cf. Anna Šabatová, 'Jak jsem potkala lidská práva,' *Křesťanská revue* 89, no. 2 (2022): 4–6.

[21] Hogan, *Keeping Faith*, 4.

[22] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation* Evangelii Gaudium *on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, 2013, 50, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html.

[25] By focusing on social and economic rights, I move towards an integral conception of rights. I take into account the issue raised by Linda Hogan: 'Insofar as it is regarded as "liberalism gone global," human rights discourse is viewed by its theological

rights will not be assessed in isolation from other rights. In the first part, the article will draw on social analyses. In the following two parts, I will construct a theologically-based vision of the 'right not to be poor' and the 'duty to be with the poor'.

1. 'Whoever Does Not Have, Even What They Have Will Be Taken from Them.'

At the time of the emergence of modern Czechoslovakia in 1918, the extended border areas (somewhat imprecisely marked the Sude-tenland) were inhabited mostly by a German speaking population. After World War II, more than two million people were expelled from Czechoslovakia. The areas most affected were what today are known as the Ústecký, Karlovarský, and Moravskoslezský regions. These areas were subsequently resettled in several waves. The communist regime invited people to the borderlands because of the prospect of affordable housing and well-paid work in coal mines and heavy industry. Libor Prudký described the post-war decades as 'a combination of devastation, pride and a service to socialism – these were typical features of the population here'.[24] With the fall of communism in 1989 came the large-scale closure of mines and industries, with little compensation for the workers. In addition, the environment was severely polluted due to former surface coal mines and heavy industry. The new neo-liberal regime preferred instant economic return to long-term development. 'The result is a situation of resignation, without significant hopes and perspectives. From this also flows an important lack of civil checks on government. And this again contributes to tensions and the emergence of extreme reactions and conflicts.'[25] The regions became peripheries 'in which live people who are excluded from the mainstream development of society – these people are at the margins of development'.[26]

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critics as nothing more than individualism, secularism, and Western political imperialism in disguise.' Hogan, *Keeping Faith*, 2.

[24] Libor Prudký, Michaela Šmídová, and Kateřina Vojtíšková, *Periferie, kraje, hodnoty. Možnosti periferních krajů na cestě za dobrými hodnotami* (Brno: CDK, 2016), 72.

[25] Prudký, Šmídová, and Vojtíšková, *Periferie*, 152.

[26] Jiří Musil and Jan Müller, 'Vnitřní periferie v České republice jako mechanizmus sociální exkluze,' *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 44, no. 2 (2008): 321–348, 323.

The current image of the regions is rather stark but still true to reality. Here you will find concentrated disadvantages: a long-term drop in the number of inhabitants thanks to the significant outflow of young people, poor public transport and basic services, the highest rates of unemployment, a high proportion of the population with low educational achievement or without education, the lowest proportion of university graduates, the lowest wages, high numbers of people living on social benefits, and a high crime rate.[27] Widespread debt among low-income households further contributes to the deterioration of family life.[28] Regarding family patterns, the research by Dana Hamplová revealed that 'traditional family norms and behaviour are weakest among those with low education in regions with a high incidence of socio-economic problems.'[29] It is socio-economic hardship that causes families to break up. 'The erosion of economic security contributes to the gradual weakening of family structures.'[30] According to Petr Fučík, in these regions, we observe a higher incidence of women with low education who give birth outside marriage and raise children as single mothers. Moreover, couples with low education are more likely to divorce. The causes for this must be sought among the harsh living conditions in which less educated people often live.[31] The cumulative disadvantages can aptly be described as St Matthew's effect.[32]

Compared to other regions of the Czech Republic, the social and economic rights of residents of peripheral regions are supported significantly less, if not even violated. We can apply to these regions the following words from *Fratelli tutti*: 'It frequently becomes clear that, in practice, human rights are not equal for all.'[33] Inequality in access

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[27] Cf. Marie Feřtrová, 'Unemployment and Social Security Benefits,' in *Atlas of socio-spatial differentiation of the Czech Republic*, ed. Martin Ouředníček, Jana Temelová, and Lucie Pospíšilová (Praha: Karolinum, 2011), 35–43.

[28] See an interactive map of debts created by Otevřená společnost o.p.s. available on webpage http://mapaexekuci.cz/index.php/mapa-2.

[29] Dana Hamplová, 'Rodinné chování a hodnoty a vzdělání,' in *Na vzdělání záleží. Jak vzdělanostní rozdíly ovlivňují osudy lidí v České společnosti*, ed. Dana Hamplová and Tomáš Katrňák (Brno: CDK, 2018), 75–88, 76.

[30] Hamplová, 'Rodinné chování,' 88.

[31] Petr Fučík, 'Vzdělání a riziko rozvodu,' in *Na vzdělání záleží. Jak vzdělanostní rozdíly ovlivňují osudy lidí v České společnosti*, ed. Dana Hamplová and Tomáš Katrňák (Brno: CDK, 2018), 109–121, 120.

[32] The designation refers to Matt 13,12: 'Whoever has, will be given more, and they will have abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.' It was popularised by Robert K. Merton in the 1960s for success and failure in science.

[33] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 22.

to rights is a manifestation of injustice. In line with other thinkers, the Pope speaks about the structural causes of inequality.[34] Zuzana Uhde explains that 'structural injustices are not the result of the deliberate actions of individual actors or state institutions.'[35] They are a kind of moral wrong resulting from the actions of many actors, individual and institutional, who pursue their own interests. Refering to Ignacio Ella- curía, Jon Sobrino insisted that, in the real world, the fact that human rights are real for some people often means that they are denied and even violated by others.[36] Although people exposed to structural injus- tice do not seem to share a common identity, the non-individualised character of social exclusion was underlined, and a critique was made of the hegemonic political discourse, which individualises poverty and frames it as an aberration.[37] In the context of this article, it is important to define residents living in the border areas of the Czech Republic as a collective subject in relation to social structures.

Inequality in access to rights is linked to inequality in the concept of rights. Ever since the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the suggested symmetry between civil and political rights, on the one hand, and economic and social rights, on the other, has been questioned.[38] Even today, the prevailing liberal model considers only civil and political rights as basic rights, whereas social and econom- ic 'rights' 'are recognized only for instrumental reasons as a means of achieving civil and political equality'.[39] Hogan admits that 'there remains within human rights discourse a failure to appreciate the depth of the impact that material conditions have on the construction of subjectivity.'[40] Petra Gümplová suggests that civil and political rights cannot be considered in isolation from material circumstances.

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[34] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 116.
[35] Zuzana Uhde, 'Lidská práva v zajetí hranic: zdroje konfliktů a transnacionální migrace,' in *Lidská práva v mezikulturních perspektivách*, ed. Petr Agha (Praha: Aca- demia, 2018), 277–296, 285.
[36] Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor. Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 12.
[37] See Chris Shannahan, 'The Violence of Poverty: Theology and Activism in an "Age of Austerity",' *Political Theology* 20, no. 3 (2019), 243–261.
[38] 'On Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Fifty Years Later: A Statement of the Ramsey Colloquium,' *First Things* 82 (Apr 1998): 18–22.
[39] Marek Hrubec, 'Lidská práva mezi inkluzí a exkluzí. Dynamika vývoje západní právní sféry a její meze v éře globálního kapitalismu,' in *Lidská práva v mezikulturních per- spektivách*, ed. Petr Agha (Praha: Academia, 2018), 77–95, 85.
[40] Hogan, *Keeping Faith*, 100n40.

Focusing on political participation, she argues that legitimate process-es of decision making require substantial equality among participants:

> If individuals or groups are subjected to discrimination, are not afforded social and cultural recognition, or are systematically excluded from access to some basic services and economic advantages (poverty, education, adequate health care, the possibility of trade unions), then it is difficult for them to fully participate in the process of political participation.[41]

In accordance with the *Universal Declaration*, I find it important to perceive different types of rights as equal. How can this be mirrored in theology when it reflects on the situation of people with cumulative disadvantages? I believe the answer can be found in the concept of integral human development.[42] What this concept wants to achieve was beautifully captured earlier (though in a different context) by Henri Nouwen: 'The struggle to which the God of the Bible calls his people is much larger than struggle for political or economic rights. It is a struggle against all the forces of death wherever they become manifest and a struggle for life in the fullest sense.'[43] There is a rich biblical tradition interpreting the basic equality of people before God. When this equality is violated – either by force or by a sequence of events – God takes the side of widows and orphans, the poor and strangers, and requires special care for them. Hogan concludes, '[t]he designation of these particular groups for special care arises from their vulnerability in the existing Jewish society and that of its neighbours.'[44] It seems that biblical tradition encourages the pursuit of justice through partiality and also values the material conditions necessary for a good life.

In line with these ideas, Pope Paul VI made use of the language of human rights in addressing structural and institutional concerns in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* from 1967. '[It] argued for radical change in order to combat the inherent institutional injustices in the

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[41] Petra Gümplová, 'Lidská práva a právo na přírodní zdroje,' in *Lidská práva v mezikulturních perspektivách*, ed. Petr Agha (Praha: Academia, 2018), 299–319, 317.

[42] See the webpage of The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development: https://www.humandevelopment.va.

[43] Henri Nouwen, 'Forward,' in *We Drink from our own Wells. A Spiritual Journey of a People*, Gustavo Gutiérrez (Maryknoll, Orbis Books: 1984), xvi.

[44] Hogan, *Human Rights*, 17.

world's economic and political order.'[45] Inspired by this move towards human rights discourse, in the next two sections, I also return to the language of human rights in the search for an adequate response to the experience of structural injustice as we encounter it, for example, in the Czech borderlands.

2. The 'Divine Right' Not to Be Poor

In the introduction, I mentioned liberation theology as a theology that places the case of people on the periphery at the centre of its reflection on faith. Liberation theologians do not usually turn to human rights because these have often been reduced to first generation rights and promoted by the oppressors.[46] However, this is not so in the work of some scholars such as José Ignacio Gonzáles Faus. He contributed a chapter on anthropology to *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*,[47] a kind of *summa theologiae* of Latin American liberation theology. Faus calls on the First World to revise its sacrosanct slogan of 'human rights', which so far has mostly meant no more than 'individual privileges'. Such revision could follow the sense of Augusto Cesar Sandino's statement: 'The rights of the poor are more *sacred* than the rights of the powerful.'[48] Faus reads Sandino's words in the light of Nikolai Berdyaev's expression: 'Bread for me is a material problem, whereas bread for my brother is a *spiritual* problem.'[49] He goes on and explains:

> This approach would allow us to understand the term 'sacred' in Sandi-
> no's phrase, and enable us to see that in this phrase, we are in the presence

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[45] Hogan, *Human Rights*, 43. *Populorum Progression* was preceded Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*. Hogan claims that 'it is really with *Pacem in Terris* that one can see the Church making a radical break with its conservative past and being prepared to criticise existing social and legal structures.' (Hogan, *Human Rights*, 42). The same author, however, believes that 'one must see *Pacem in Terris* as an integral part of a tradition rather than as a radical innovation' (41).

[46] Cf. Mark Engler, 'Toward the "Rights of the Poor": Human Rights in Liberation Theology,' *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 3 (2000), 339-365.

[47] Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books: 1993).

[48] José Ignacio Gonzáles Faus, 'Anthropology: The Person and the Community,' in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, Orbis Books: 1993), 516.

[49] Faus, 'Anthropology,' 516.

of a truth which is religious in itself because, as with the reality of God, it can only be *recognized*. It cannot be imposed by itself, since the weak are supposed to be those who lack the power to impose even their most basic rights.[50]

I quote Faus at length because the way he connects the rights of the poor with the terms *sacred* and *spiritual* is crucial. Here, the divine is associated with that form of humanity that is weak and helpless, dependent on the mercy of others, especially God's mercy. It is reminiscent of Matthew 5,3, the *ptóchoi* entirely dependent on the goodness of God. They are entitled to the kingdom of heaven. Here, the divine promise is manifested as a right.[51] Obviously, poverty as such is not a desirable end: Berdyaev speaks about a spiritual *problem* to be addressed. We can return to *Fratelli tutti*. The right of the poor not to be poor is, first and foremost, the right to life-giving communion with others. If inequality of rights stemming from structural injustice disrupts the community and is a manifestation of a broken community, then the recognition of equal rights for all, i.e. the recognition of the human person as a person and as a dignified subject, will help to rebuild the community.

There are still other theologians who have explored the divine element in the rights of the poor. Jeremy Waldron connects the classical idea of *imago Dei* with certain kinds of rights. The first is the basic right to life and recognition of the sacredness of human life.[52] The second encompasses welfare rights, the most elementary requirements of concern for one another's subsistence. Waldron believes that this perspective is in accord with Matthew's account of the presence of Christ in every needy or vulnerable person. The third kind of right relating to *imago Dei* is the right not to be subject to degrading treatment. Hurting a human being represents hurting the divine person whom he or she portrays.

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[50] Faus, 'Anthropology,' 516.

[51] This idea is reflected in Jon Sobrino's essay 'The Divine Element in the Struggle for Human Rights,' in *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 103–114.

[52] Jeremy Waldron, 'The image of God: rights, reason, and order,' in *Christianity and Human Rights. An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 226–227. Waldron's thought is reminiscent of Jan M. Lochman, who grounds the right of our humanity in the theology of creation. See Jan Milíč Lochman, *Krédo. Základy ekumenické dogmatiky* (Praha: Kalich, 1996), 74–77.

The idea of dignity and worth of all human beings based on the exalted status of being created in the divine image is further developed by Desmond Tutu. Even more strongly than Waldron, Tutu does not hesitate to call every human person a God carrier and – inspired by the language of the New Testament – also a sanctuary and a temple of the Holy Spirit. Tutu appreciates the Buddhist practice of bowing before another human being when the God in me greets the God in you. 'This preciousness, this infinitive worth, is intrinsic to who we all are and is inalienable as a gift from God to be acknowledged as an inalienable right of all human beings.'[53] Much like Waldron in his third point, Tutu claims that to oppress human beings is not just evil but blasphemous, 'for it is tantamount to spitting in the face of God'.[54] Tutu seeks human freedom in the character of God, or better, in God's acts. The Israelites, with their own experience of slavery, depicted God as the great liberator. Christians declare that Christ has set us free; therefore, we have all kinds of rights and freedoms: autonomy, expression, association, etc.

In her brief outline of the antecedents of human rights thinking, Hogan mentions the covenant between God and the people as the most important religious event. Since the covenant is made after the exodus from Egypt, 'this of course is highly significant in thinking about human rights because the exodus itself can be interpreted as an instance of Yahweh's vindication of the rights of the oppressed'.[55] Both covenant and exodus enhanced a notion of human dignity and worth. Hogan concludes that 'the covenant's concern with social justice is a central component. In this one can see many antecedents of the human rights tradition.'[56] David E. Aune brings an important dimension to biblically-based research on human rights, namely eschatology. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom amounts to an eschatological social reversal in which the current reality is turned upside down: God accepts the poor and rejects the rich. It signals 'a subversion of the typical religious values and conceptions that characterized the

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[53] Desmond M. Tutu, 'The First Word: To Be Human Is to Be Free,' in *Christianity and Human Rights. An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–7, 2.
[54] Tutu, 'The First Word,' 3.
[55] Hogan, *Human Rights*, 16.
[56] Hogan, *Human Rights*, 17.

Jewish religious establishment'.[57] It is present, for example, in the Beatitudes: 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God' (Luke 6:20).[58]

3. 'Divine Duty' to Be with the Poor

As a relational category, human rights express both entitlements and obligations. Witte puts it bluntly, '[t]he rights of the poor and needy in society (…) [correlate with the] duties of all to support and protect them as they have means.'[59] I will focus on the theological foundations of human mutuality, particularly as it relates to the situation of people living on the peripheries.

First, however, I would like to examine two perspectives on the relationship between rights and obligations, which I consider erroneous. They go like this: people may claim their rights only to that degree to which they are willing to fulfil their duties, and one should be modest in claiming rights and should rather look to one's duties. Although there are some valid elements in such perspectives, they are fundamentally flawed. Duties are not symmetrical to rights. Rights are not conditioned by fulfilling duties. Speaking theologically, rights are not merits; they are divine endowments and thus entitlements. Moreover, though a call to be modest in claiming rights makes sense as a manifestation of voluntary free modesty, it is, however, completely inconsistent with advocacy for the right of the other, e.g. the poor. Over against such misconceptions, I would like to quote Šabatová, who captured the spirit of human rights in this way: 'It is good to realize that every virtuous activity, caring for others, caring for nature, raising your voice to protect the rights of the weak and forgotten also contributes to the protection of human rights and makes our society better and more humane.'[60] Human rights as emerging from oneself towards others was highlighted

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[57] David E. Aune, 'Human Rights and Early Christianity,' in *Christianity and Human Rights. An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 84–85.

[58] See also the interpretation of the same verse in Petr Pokorný, *Ježíš Nazaretský: historický obraz a jeho interpretace* (Praha: Oikúmené, 2005), 26: 'The promise to the poor means that in God's absolute (eschatological) future there will be no social deprivation, which Jesus recognized as the worst consequence of human alienation (sin) and the heaviest burden for those affected by it.'

[59] Witte, 'Introduction,' 18.

[60] Šabatová, 'Jak jsem potkala lidská práva,' 6.

by Pavel Keřkovský with reference to the commandment of love: 'The biblical message confirms these activities by teaching that it is not so much a matter of whether I have the right to something, but whether I am able to grant dignity and human rights to another – that is, to love him as myself.'[61]

Having dealt with these issues, I will begin to address the question of the divine nature of the duty to people in need, such as those on the peripheries. According to Archbishop Tutu, it is the religious duty of all people of good will to stand up in opposition to injustice and oppression. He is quite clear that 'any person of faith has no real option'.[62] It is faith that must galvanise human beings with a zeal 'to be active protectors of the rights of persons'.[63] Interestingly, the eschatological dimension returns here again in the most famous gospel justification of the duty to the poor in Matthew 25. It emphasises that acts of love and solidarity matter for the future that God is creating.[64] According to Hogan, there is a double challenge contained in the preaching of Jesus. First, it requires Christians to work for the coming of the Kingdom by introducing equality into social, economic, and political relationships. Second, his message forces us 'to look at the marginalised with new eyes, to see in them not failure and poverty, but God's blessing. By privileging the outcast, the Gospel challenges us to see the inherent and inalienable dignity and worth of each person.'[65] It is another expression of the eschatological social reversal that was already mentioned above. Independently of Hogan, Sobrino thought extensively about this second point. He says we should be grateful to victims. A dehumanised society becomes more human when it allows itself to be healed by victims and is grateful for that. 'Through what

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[61] Pavel Keřkovský, 'Lidská práva se uskutečňují každodenním uznáváním důstojnosti druhého,' *Křesťanská revue* 89, no. 2 (2022): 20–23, 23. Formulations of the Decalogue go in the same vein: 'There one is not informed about one's rights, but is made aware of the rights of others.' Jan Roskovec, 'Lidská práva: svoboda člověka v nedokonalém světě,' in *Křesťanství a lidská práva*, ed. Jiří Hanuš (Brno: CDK, 2002), 85–89, 87–88.

[62] Tutu, 'The First Word,' 3.

[63] Tutu, 'The First Word,' 3.

[64] Robert A. Seipe, 'Christianity, Human Rights, and a Theology That Touches the Ground,' in *Christianity and Human Rights. An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 320–334, 321.

[65] Hogan, *Human Rights*, 20.

they are, they open our eyes to what we are, our own truth, which we wish so much to conceal.'[66]

Human rights remind us of our interrelatedness which is ultimately based on our life-giving relationship with God. Human interrelatedness binds us to mutual accountability. Seipe infers that 'we hold each other accountable for creating the conditions that will optimize human rights.'[67] In particular, we can create a better environment for others to make good decisions. This applies well to the people living on the peripheries: people with limited access to good education, housing, and well-paid work, people geographically and socially cut off from the benefits of a developing society, and people whose family patterns correspond to the limited possibilities of life. The quality of their decisions certainly depends on economic conditions. In difficult circumstances, decisions are made that do not originate in freedom and strength, but in weakness and poverty. Seipe even suggests that there is 'the kind of poverty that can now be defined as a condition that precludes ethical consideration'.[68] Therefore, supporting human rights can help to create a situation in which people at the margins will be able to make meaningful decisions and perhaps even make decisions for the greater good.

Finally, with regard to duty to others, especially the poor, we should consider the problem of representing the other. Hogan reminds us how important it is to 'unlearn our conviction that we are entitled and able to speak for the marginalized'.[69] Even well-intended advocacy of the rights of the poor can actually forget that it is the others who define themselves and their needs and claims. Human rights discourse is by no means exempt from the temptation of colonialism. However, this does not necessarily lead to silence. 'It may be (…) our capacity to imaginatively inhabit the world of the other that will secure the kind of shared political culture.'[70] The awareness of duty towards others, as well as the impossibility of representing them absolutely, leads us to learn to live creatively in the tension between speaking for others and giving space while being silent.

[66] Jon Sobrino, 'Eine kranke Zivilisation vermenschlichen,' *Concilium* 45, no. 1 (März 2009), 55–65, 63.
[67] Seipe, 'Christianity,' 330.
[68] Seipe, 'Christianity,' 329.
[69] Hogan, *Keeping Faith*, 86.
[70] Hogan, *Keeping Faith*, 10.

Conclusion: Together with Others in the Service of Testimony and Hope

I believe that the language of human rights can prove to be of good service to Christian theology, and especially anthropology, when it seeks to reflect on human community and its ills. In Hogan's words,

> Christians come to the language of human rights (…) not as strangers to a modern discourse but rather from within their theological heritage. (…) Thus, human rights language can function also within a theological frame and as a language through which the demands of Christian witness can be expressed.[71]

It helps the Church to remain a prophetic voice and to be the protector of the vulnerable. At the same time, using the language of human rights requires humility from Christians. First, it is because the concept of human rights 'confronts the Church with the reality that in order to be a credible witness to human rights it needs to be an exemplar. It must incarnate, both within its own community, and in its relations with others, its commitment to human rights.'[72] Second, the doctrine of human rights enables Christians 'to understand their own praxis (…) [as] part of a larger commitment which all human beings can share. It is not a provincial or local language, rather it is one which unites them with people of many creeds and none.'[75] Such an experience undoubtedly poses a challenge to the identity of Christians.

This article explored the meaning of human rights in theological reflections on poverty – for example, poverty on the Czech peripheries. It sought to show that the language of human rights, understood in a certain way, is a relevant language for theology and that human rights – both as entitlements and duties – can even be grounded in the mystery of God. By way of conclusion, I wish to underline two specific roles of Christian communities in relation to the human rights of the poor. First, Christians, aware of the inalienable dignity of all persons, can be steadfast witnesses to various kinds of human rights violations. Rather than worrying about their own rights, they could serve the

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[71] Hogan, *Keeping Faith*, 4.
[72] Hogan, *Human Rights*, 48.
[75] Hogan, *Human Rights*, 48.

rights of others. This would be a significant way to fulfil the mission of proclaiming the Gospel today. Second, human rights are a sign of hope. Just as Jeremiah went out and bought a field when the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem (Jer. 32:6–44), Christians can show similar signs of hope despite seemingly hopeless situations and times.

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REVIEWS & NEWS

Ivana Noble, Zdenko Širka (eds.), *Kdo je člověk – Teologická antropogie ekumenicky* [Who Is the Human Being in Relation to God – Theological Anthropology Ecumenically], Praha: Karolinum, 2021, 344 pages, ISBN: 978-80-246-4779-1.

D A N I E L A   B R Ů H O V Á

The central theme of the book is the human being in relation to God, and at the same time to other people; it deals with the topics of gender and gender identity, ethics, human freedom and responsibility, but also spirituality, culture and society, religious tradition, the church and the times in which we live, and the relationship to the landscape. The book and its authors 'do not talk about a man just to talk about God' (p. 15); they focus on 'man's place in the world, but they do not replace theological anthropology with either cosmology or political theology' (p. 15).

The themes are treated from a Christian perspective, which is strengthened and broadened by an ecumenical perspective since the eighteen contributors to the book come from different Christian confessions. Their approach to the subject is interdisciplinary, and they include biblical scholars, religious scholars, systematic and practical theologians, religious philosophers, and specialists who deal with spirituality, political theology, ethics, and ritual. The authors 'deliberately go beyond theological concepts that assume a kind of protective "epistemological safety" for theological science' (p. 12), thereby encouraging the reader to think more deeply about the issues at hand.

The book is divided into two parts, the first of which is subtitled: 'We Are Born into the Life That Was Here before Us'. In five chapters, it seeks answers to questions about human communication, both horizontal and vertical, and how to understand human communication properly. The second part is subtitled: 'We Are Who We Are Becoming'. In nine chapters, it seeks answers to why man is here, what he was created to do, and when a person is a person. Theological anthropology, as the book's authors conceive it, 'distinguishes between the image of God that we are and the image of God that we grow into or that we disobey' (p. 13).

Central to the methodology employed is hermeneutics, which is treated here in a broad sense as a theology of understanding that 'includes a participation in a tradition of understanding that asks for the truth about the human being as an "inclusion" of themes and insights that must appear in any good interperetation' (p. 30). The use of the hermeneutic method, as opposed to the epistemological method, asks questions of the reader and draws the reader into

a discussion of the themes of the book. Theologians of various denominations were invited to collaborate by Ivana Noble, the theologian and head of the Ecumenical Institute of the Protestant Theological Faculty (PTF) of Charles University in Prague, who also served as co-editor of the book with Zdenko Širka.

The selection of topics follows a classical structure but brings new modern perspectives and insights. The book offers a wide range of perspectives on anthropological issues from the perspective of theology, and the authors, although coming from different Christian confessions, manage to find a common language. They tell the story of the human person from the perspective of the founding relationship that, in the theological tradition, determines everything else. This is not done in a dogmatic or fundamentalist way, but it points to the emphasis that we are not here alone, that we have not given our lives to each other, that we are in the same boat with each other, that no one is an isolated island. It is in these emphases that theology has something to give to the other scientific disciplines, for it is indispensable in speaking of God, of the relationship to man, to the creation and to nature. As Aristotle Papanikolaou characterises it in his preface, speaking of humanity as a microcosm that is reflected in our relationships with other human beings and that transforms us (p. 10). It is a transformation in which the division between a person's past and future is abolished; both are infused into the eternal presence of God's life (p. 10), he continues.

Part I: 'We Are Born into the Life That Was Here before Us' brings a new perspective on how to think and talk about human beings. It is interested in 'how the human creature understands the life into which he is thrust, which was there before him and out of which he is woven' (p. 40), and observes that 'understanding happens through relationship, in the case of relationship to God, through an asymmetrical relationship' (p. 40). Methodologically, this part of the book works with existential hermeneutics. The first part consists of five chapters that deal with the human being grounded in what is home, living in relationships, stories, speech, symbols, and rituals.

In the first chapter, 'Man as a Relational Creature', Tim Noble critically reflects on the modern notion of autonomy, 'that man is always necessarily shaped by relationships' (p. 51). He is born into relationships in which he is dependent on others and needs the other to know himself (p. 51). Thus he is born to freedom and responsibility in relationships because there is no freedom without relationships, nor relationships without freedom (p. 55). 'Yet relationships themselves are not yet 'God' or the goal – they are the path we take to God' (p. 56).

In Chapter Two: 'Man and Speech', Zdenko Širka deals with how speech becomes home to man. 'From a theological - anthropological point of view, it is interesting for us that Heidegger does not assign speech to man, but directly to being' (p. 60). He reflects that, through speech, man also expresses existential questions and formulates questions about God.

In the next chapter: 'People Living in Stories', the authors Pavel Hošek and Pavol Bargár move from speech to stories. They address the fact that human identity is a narrative identity and humans are creatures living in stories, noting that embracing a particular cultural or religious tradition is sometimes referred to as 'entering a story' (p. 76). From the perspective of theological anthropology, they address the question of 'how the human story relates to the story of God' (p. 78) and show what truly following Jesus Christ can mean for a person. For them, 'the way of following is meant to be a way of being for others' (p. 86), and Christian identity becomes an embodied story (p. 86).

In Chapter Four: 'Man and Ritual', Tabita Landová and Michaela Vlčková speak of ritual as the mother tongue of religion, for 'in ritual action people express their relationship to God and at the same time expect the revival, affirmation, and renewal of their faith' (p. 103). They identify baptism as a key Christian rite of passage (p. 97), using it and other sacraments to show that 'in ritual, people experience and manifest God's story together' (p. 106), into which they are drawn, shaped, and transformed.

The final chapter of Part One called 'Being and Understanding in the Symbolic Key' focuses on the symbol that story and ritual establish and shows a person 'who is able to exist symbolically, to understand reality, and to create' (p. 107), for when one 'dreams, creates, and encounters the transcendent, the symbol comes into play' (p. 108). Symbolic being and understanding includes a corporeal and material component, 'the body, corporeality, and rootedness in the immanent world are prerequisites for the emergence of the symbol' (p. 108). At the same time, the author Kateřina Kočandrle-Bauer points out the difference between a symbol and an idol and the thin line between these concepts.

In Part II: 'We Are Who We Are Becoming', the various authors return to the content of what different theological traditions have said about the man and what is still meaningful today, addressing what needs to be grasped in a new way and how to deal with questions that are new to us and to which neither the Bible nor the Christian tradition provides clear and unambiguous answers. They try to relate the old and the new to each other in a new way. This part of the book works methodologically with a hermeneutical ontology.

In chapter six, entitled 'The Image and Likeness of God', Ivana Noble shows through the creation stories that humans 'mirror God in two ways: as God's image, i.e., gift, givenness' (p. 124), and also as God's likeness, which is a calling and invitation to grow into God's likeness. She says that 'pointing people toward God carries within it a life that fulfills and transforms all human relationships' (p. 133). She also discusses the difference between 'when people are icons of God and when they are idols' (p. 134). She reflects on 'where evil is taken up again and again in human life and why it carries death, and where good is taken up and why it carries life' (p. 137), and what role sin plays in this and what God's help is, for 'through God's grace man has the possibility of transcending himself' (p. 143). The biblical reflection on man's place

in the world is continued by Mireia Ryšková in the chapter 'Man Alienated and Redeemed'. She focuses on biblical texts that show a renewed creation through Jesus Christ, who 'is the "prototype" of the new man, the fulfillment of man's original purpose as created in the image of God' (p. 147). This is also manifested through the Church. 'All that matters in the Christian community is the realisation of its being as a new creation' (p. 160), the author says.

Denisa Červenková writes about the discernment between good and evil and between other forces acting in man that bring him closer to the fulfilment of the values of humanity (p. 162) in the chapter 'Man Able to Discern'. To discern, according to her, means 'to examine how human and divine reality meet at the level of inner experience' (p. 183). She goes on to show how the Christian tradition 'speaks of the search for and discernment of God's will' (p. 165), the basis of which remains the discernment of biblical experience with God's positive action toward man (p. 169), which opens up a relational and social dimension 'on the way to the experience of freedom and a healthy relationship to oneself and to the whole of reality' (p. 186).

The human ability to reflect on what is right and desirable in relation to human behaviour is described in Chapter 9 'Ethics, Freedom and Responsibility' by Ondřej Fischer and Libor Ovečka. They reflect on the role of authority in human life, both external and internal, as well as on moral values, which are 'characteristics of human action, or will, understood as deliberation about desired action' (p. 199).

The tenth chapter, by Ivana Noble and Kateřina Kočandrle-Bauer, touches on a topic that is highly important in today's society, offering a theological perspective on the issue of gender. They deal with questions of gender identities and roles, but also 'on what theological grounds one distinguishes which relationships and unions are considered acceptable' (p. 209). They show that part of the theological heritage contributes to the problems that different societies have in this area today. The chapter does not shy away from all the complicated issues related to and connected with the theme of gender. It is not only about the relationship between man and woman, but also about the conceptions when sexuality involves only two sexes, when the identity of gender is not as clear and stable as assumed. It seeks to unpack what the theological tradition has to say about this and also when it has said more than it should have in the past, or when, on the contrary, it has not said something substantial. Despite touching on controversial issues, the chapter is measured in tone. The authors attempt to convey to the reader the arguments of the various backgrounds that enter into this debate.

In Chapter Eleven 'The Human Being as a Creature Inhabiting the Landscape', František Štěch focuses on three ways of inhabiting space by man: dwelling in the landscape of this world, cohabitation in community, and cohabitation realised in the community of believers, i.e. from the perspective of religious practice. He sees the landscape as a witness to 'human and divine action in the world' (p. 243), bearing witness to this coexistence.

The political dimensions of man from the perspective of theology are discussed by Petr Jandejsek in the chapter 'Man and the Polis', offering theological accounts of how the polis is one of the places in which 'God's creative action is actualised in free human action' (p. 257), both positive and negative, which he analyses as 'sins against the polis' (p. 257). He discusses their impact on society, but also the dynamics of faith where 'the effort to create an earthly community draws its hope from the coming gift of the heavenly community' (p. 265).

Chapter Thirteen 'Man in Time' finds Ondřej Kolář and Martin Vaňáč writing about a man living in linear time and the tension between the present transient time and God's eternity, which allows man to recognise his limitations, but at the same time, gives direction to human endeavour and invites him to overcome his own limits (p. 268).

In the final chapter 'Church and Eternity', Viorel Coman discusses the basic characteristics of ecclesial anthropology in light of four fundamental ecclesiological concepts: communion, mystery, theosis, and meditation. He explains who a man is as a 'priest of creation' (p. 302), that 'man as microcosm shares in all levels of the reality of the universe' (p. 303), and that the priestly vocation and mediating role is fully manifested in the Eucharistic liturgy' (p. 303). At the end of the book, we find a short summary, a rich bibliography, and medallions of the authors.

The comprehensive book *Who is a Man* looks at anthropological themes through contemporary theological knowledge. A beneficial aspect of the book is the ecumenical perspective, where the individual authors, although coming from different Christian confessions with their own linguistic and theological perceptions, manage to find a common language without their text losing its distinctiveness. The whole book thus offers a multiplicity of authors who are well matched and together are able to look at the human being from different perspectives and contexts and to see together, ecumenically, 'who the human being is'.

A Conference Report: 'The Process of Maturing: Human Childhood and Adulthood in a Theological Perspective' (2–5 September 2021, Fortna monastery, Prague)

MIREIA RYŠKOVÁ, LIBOR OVEČKA

Within the project Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective, the international conference focused on the important issue of childhood and adolescence, particularly on reaching human maturity from a theological perspective. Childhood and adolescence are not only important periods of human development from a biological and psychosocial point of view but also from a spiritual perspective, i.e. as regards finding mature faith and attitudes and relationships based on it. Contemporary society is focused on youth mostly without deeper reflection, so this conference aimed to reflect on the phenomenon of childhood, maturation, and maturity in a broader context. The future of society and the world depends on true adulthood and spiritual maturity. However, it is necessary to ask: What is the significance of childhood for human maturing/adulthood? What are the factors that foster maturing, and what hinders or limits it?

On Thursday, September 2, 2021, Ivana Noble opened the conference with her introductory lecture, in which she pointed out the basic findings of developmental psychology (Piaget, Ericsson), stages of moral development (Kolhberg), and spiritual development (Fowler). In doing so, she stressed the importance of moving towards maturity (calling a person to mature adulthood), which, however, in the spiritual sphere does not mean simply 'copying' the development of the human personality from other aspects. This opened up the space for the whole conference and especially for *the first block of lectures* ('Moving between Childhood to Adulthood in the Abrahamic Religions'), which was devoted to different perspectives on the evaluation of childhood and adulthood in Jewish (Aleš Weiss: 'When Israel was a Child…'), Christian patristic (Václav Ježek: 'Childhood and Adulthood: Christian Scriptural and Patristic Images'), and the Islamic tradition (Amina Nawaz and Mujadad Zaman: 'The Transition between Childhood and Adulthood in the Legal, the Ritual and the Mystical Traditon of Islam' – online). The individual contributions showed that different traditions (despite the commonalities given by the generally valid laws of development) put different emphases in defining what constitutes maturity (moreover, gender-specific) and in defining when a person is considered an adult (moral responsibility, holiness, economic security, status).

On Friday, September 3, 2021, there were 3 blocks of main lectures and one block of small group sessions and short papers. *The second block of lectures*

under the title 'Theological Reflections on the Physical and the Symbolic Reality of Childhood' was devoted to both the phenomenon of birth/rebirth in the Christian liturgical tradition (Olga Lossky: 'The Physical and the Symbolic Reality of Human Birth in Christian Liturgical Tradition') and the 'reverse' side of childhood, i.e. its fragility and vulnerability (Petre Maican: 'The Impact of Disability' – online), particularly in the sexual sphere (Marek Drábek and Petr Jandejsek: 'The Impact of Abuse'). *The third block of lectures* focused on youth and young people ('Being Young') and dealt with issues related to youth movements and their reflection (Viorel Coman: 'The Theological Impact of the Youth Movements in the 20th Century Theology') and theological reflection on youth and their needs and possibilities of reaching them in the present time (František Štěch: 'Theology of, for, and with Youth Today'). *The fourth block* was devoted to the theme 'Maturity: The Existential and the Ontological Discourses in a Conversation'. In addition to the family, as discussed by V. Ježek in the first block of lectures, the experience of friendship has a great influence. It ideally opens a person through the existential experience of personal, exclusive love to the love of others and the universe and allows one to overcome various social and other barriers, teaches man true reciprocity and respect for the freedom of the other and one's own. The best example of this is the figure of Jesus Christ (Athanasios Papanthanasiou: 'Friendship and its Formative Role: A Theological Reflection'). The second lecture, 'Maturity as Emancipation of the Subject and the Question of Freedom during the Covid Pandemic' (Michale Kirwan-Tim Noble), focused on the role of the Church in the process of human maturing and its responsibility within the contemporary world for the conditions that will allow a person to be a true subject in front of God's face, that is, a mature person according to God's plan. The path to maturity and freedom leads through man's commitment to others (solidarity, responsibility, and trust), as the Covid crisis has shown very clearly.

The small group contributions were focused differently according to the orientation of the individual PhD and post-doctoral lecturers. *Group A* included the paper 'Motherhood as a way towards maturity' (Barbora Šmejdová and Hana Benešová), which emphasised the importance of the mother for human maturation and motherhood as a spiritual attitude (the service of maturity), and the paper 'Spiritual and Ethical Aspects of Encountering Death and Dying in the Experience of People from helping Professions at the Height of the Covid Crisis' (Daniela Brůhová), which reflected on the complex professional, human, and ethical situation of health professionals at the time of the greatest covid crisis. In *Group B*, there were the contributions by Dávid Cielontko ('Human, All Too Human: Should We Ask "What Would Jesus Do" after Reading the Infancy Gospel of Thomas'), Felipe Dittrich ('Human Nature: Fixed or Open Development'), and Matej Kováčik ('Active or Passive Freedom').

Saturday, September 4, 2022, brought an unusual morning presentation and demonstration of the theme while walking through the city of Prague as a place where people are born, live, and also grow up (František Štěch,

Daniela Brůhová, Matej Kováčik, Felipe Dittrich, Pavel Pola: 'Growing in the City: A Theological Study Trip'). The environment has a considerable influence on the formation of a person, so it is desirable to pay attention to it.

The fifth session in the afternoon was devoted to adolescence and maturity in relation to fatherhood from the physical and spiritual point of view. Pavol Bargár's lecture ('Maturity and Fruitfulness in 21st Century Religous Culture') focused on the current shift from religion (institution) to personal spirituality and maturity as the ability to live in relationships. Kateřina Kočandrle Bauer ('Physical and Spiritual Parenthood: A Theological Reflection') emphasised the accompanying role of the spiritual 'father' as a guide, a companion on the path to maturity and education as a shared journey through which both parties are enriched. Education must lead to the freedom of both children and parents. Mature fatherhood, like motherhood, must combine both the physical and the spiritual.

This block of lectures was followed by a panel discussion (with panellists A. Papathanasiou, P. Pola, P. De Witt, T. Landová, I. Noble) and work in three small groups. *Group A* included papers by Bogdan Huley ('The Brotherhood of the Cross: Educating Youth within Legionary Movement in Romania'), Marieke Maes ('Human Growth and Forgiveness'), and Jana Hofmann ('Confession of Sins and its Role in Spiritual Maturation of the Individual'). In *Group B*, the presentations were given by Martina Kopecká ('"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves" Prov 31,8f. Child Friendly Churches according to World Council of Churches: Safe Space for Children'), Pieter de Witte ('Growth in Compassion: The Enlightened Education Dream of a Brave New Criminal Justice System'), Pavel Pola ('Dark Night as a Way to Spiritual Maturity: The Case of Thérèse of Lisieux'). *Group C* included two papers: 'The Role of Activity in "Self" Understanding' (Gilija Žukauskienè) and 'The Issue of Children's Salvation: Comparing Views Held by Catholics and Baptists' (Roman Shvets).

Sunday, September 5, 2021, included the final *sixth session of lectures* ('The End and the New Beginning' – online) on the issue of the difficult aspects of life and their relevance to human maturation (Ian Randall: 'Illness and Death: A Theological Reflection') and the goal of the Christian life of maturity/adulthood in Christ (John Behr: 'By Such Order and Rhythms: Growth into Maturity in Christ').

At the end of the conference, there was a presentation of new books and a final discussion of the theme, the conference, and the outlook for the future (on the theme of the next conference).

Organised as a university project, the conference sought to present an important contemporary topic from not only an ecumenical but an interfaith and international perspective to a wide range of participants from a variety of traditions and countries.

A Conference Report: 'The Role of Beauty in Being and Becoming Human: An Interdisciplinary Perspective' (19–22 May 2022, Fortna monastery, Prague)[1]

TIM NOBLE [2]

From 19–22 May 2022, an international and interdisciplinary conference took place in the Fortna monastery in Prague. It was the fifth conference[3] organised by the University Centre of Excellence: Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective (UNCE No. 204052 (HUM/012)) project. This project, led by Professor Ivana Noble, head of the Ecumenical Institute of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, combines post-doctoral and senior researchers with the active participation of doctoral students and a group who go under the title of Other Academic Researchers. It contains some twenty-six people from the Protestant and Catholic Theological Faculties of Charles University, representing Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Pastoral Theology, Ethics, as well as the Ecumenical Institute.

However, with this fifth conference, organised jointly with Masaryk University in Brno, the aim was to broaden the scope of the interdisciplinary interaction beyond the disciplines commonly found at theological faculties to include both natural, social, and historical sciences. The specific focus of the conference can be seen in its title: 'The Role of Beauty in Being and Becoming Human: An Interdisciplinary Perspective'. Although, in the end, Covid and other illnesses meant that not everyone could participate and deliver their papers,[4] the conference nevertheless managed to bring together scholars from a range of different disciplines. There were in total thirty-seven participants from Prague, Brno, and also from France, the Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, India, and China.

The conference began with introductions from the joint organisers, Professor Ivana Noble, and Professor Jiří Hanuš, professor of history in Masaryk

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[1] This report is part of the grant project 'Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective,' UNCE No. 204052 (HUM/012).

[2] Tim Noble is docent in the Ecumenical Institute of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, where he researches and teaches in the areas of missiology, Latin American Liberation Theology, Theology and Culture, and Ignatian spirituality.

[3] The four previous conferences were entitled respectively: 'Contemporary Images of Holiness' (2018), 'How Discernment between Good and Evil Shapes the Dynamics of the Human Journey,' (2019), 'The Heart in the Heartless World? Struggles for What is Central in Human Life' (2020, online), 'The Process of Maturing: Human Childhood and Adulthood in a Theological Perspective' (2021).

[4] This was particularly the case with the natural or at least mathematical sciences.

University in Brno. Professor Noble addressed the topic of 'The Role of Beauty in Understanding of the Human Self, of Transcendence and of What Is and What Is Not Holy'. This introduction also served to contextualise the conference within the broader project, picking up on themes such as discernment and maturing,[5] as well as the focus on the human being, the subject of the first book under the project.[6] Professor Hanuš considered the question 'Does Beauty Have a History?' whilst also offering some reflections on whether history, or the historical sciences, can be said to have a beauty.

The introductory session was concluded by Professor Anne Marie Reijnen from the Ecumenical Institute of the Institut Catholique of Paris. Professor Reijnen has, among other things, worked on questions of astrobiology and its theological implications, and this aspect of her work was reflected in the title of her presentation 'Notes on Beauty in Macrocosm and Microcosm: Theology in Conversation with Astro-Biology', which presented two theses, one dealing with the universal appeal of beauty, and the second arguing for the precedence of paradox over analogy.

The second session of the conference saw two papers under the general theme of intercultural theology, religious studies, and art. First, Dr. Gesa Thiessen, a German theologian resident for many years in Ireland, spoke on two dimensions of beauty, as a reminder of a lost paradise but also as a promise of eschatological fulfilment of the Kingdom to come. She was joined by Dr. Kateřina Kočandrle-Bauer of the Ecumenical Institute of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, who spoke about sophiological insights into the theme of beauty. Already at least one theme was emerging in the conference, of the relationship between transcendence and beauty and how both are rooted in concrete realities, social, political, and religious.

After these papers, the conference moved away from the directly theological, with presentations by two scholars from Brno. First, Karel Stibral, head of the Department of Environmental Sciences at Masaryk University in Brno, gave a paper on 'J.G. Sulzer: The Beauty of Nature between Science and God'. Johan Georg Suzler (1720–1779) was a Swiss mathematician and worked in the field of electricity, but also wrote a book on *General Theory of the Fine Arts*, a hugely influential work in the field of aesthetic theory in the late eighteenth century, and doc. Stibral presented Sulzer as an early writer on the relationship between nature and urbanisation.

He was followed by historian Dr. Petr Husák, whose main work is as the owner of a vineyard in southern Moravia, where he has learned to work with traditional methods of viniculture, including the use of horses instead of tractors.

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[5]   This will be the theme of the second book under the project, to be published in English, provisionally entitled *The Process of Maturing*.

[6]   Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka (eds.), *Kdo je člověk? Teologická antropologie ekumenický* (Prague: Karolinum, 2021). A Russian translation is already published: *Кто есть человек? Богословская антропология* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo BBI, 2022), and an English translation is being prepared.

This all combined in his talk on 'Does Beauty Matter in Agriculture? Landscape, Wine and Horses'. The lecture began with a methodological reflection on his located position as someone with an academic formation (a doctorate in history) and a practitioner and how these combine, before going on to reflect on the role of beauty in agriculture.

The focus of the fourth main session of the programme was on art and beauty, beginning with reflections on French ecclesial art, as reflected in the work of a Dominican priest, Marie-Alain (Pierre) Couturier (1897–1954), offered by Norbert Schmidt, director of the Centre of Theology and Art at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University, and then continued by a contribution on a sense of beauty in music from doc. Martin Flašar of the Department of Musicology of Masaryk University, looking at different aesthetic theories of music.

The next main session of the programme was in the form of a roundtable, in which three participants reflected on the role (or indeed absence) of beauty in their work. The three were doc. Petr Gallus, a systematic theologian from the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Professor Vít Hloušek, head of the International Institute of Political Science at Masaryk University in Brno, and sociologist and journalist Dr. Jan Jandourek. It was apparent that beauty was not an obvious category for any of them in terms of their academic work.

The final main session of the conference had as its centrepiece a lecture (unfortunately online) from an Indian Orthodox priest, Fr George M. Kondothra, who is also an artist and psychotherapist, showing how beauty is a unifying theme. Responses to this lecture were given by Pavel Pola OCD, a Carmelite priest and doctoral student at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Professor Pavel Hošek from the same faculty, and clinical psychologist and psychotherapist Dr Gabriela Ďurašková.

Apart from the main sessions, the conference also included other activities. There were two short papers sessions, each divided into three groups and with three speakers in each group. The eighteen papers were delivered by doctoral students, postdocs and lecturers from different countries (ten in all) and representing a number of institutions. Topics ranged widely, looking at what happens when beauty is not present, at beauty in the time of war in Ukraine, at different ways of perceiving beauty from patristic times onwards, on beauty and difference and the transformative power and the role of beauty in various settings, to name just some.

The conference also had two less directly academic parts that sought to root the concept of beauty. The first was a walk in Prague, encouraging participants to seek out beauty in the urban landscape and culminating in a guided tour of a recently reconstructed building on Národní třida in Prague, whose architects had sought to draw on existing elements of a number of earlier buildings, linking them in a sustainable and architecturally and visually impressive manner. The second element was an exhibition of a series

of paintings on the Life of Mary by Professor Ivana Noble, exhibited in the church of Fortna monastery.

In conclusion, a few words are in order about the overall impressions of the conference. The interdisciplinary nature of the conference was a positive experience, though it also brought out the difficulties faced in talking across disciplines and across methodologies. Aesthetic concepts may have a relatively established place in the world of systematic theology and the arts, but clearly this is not a category that other, especially social sciences, would feel at home with. At its best, such an experience can lead to challenges both ways, for social sciences to incorporate the category of beauty (which is after all an important aspect of life for many people and many societies) and for those in theology and the arts to reflect on how beauty can be talked about not just in terms of aesthetic theories and concepts but also in terms of practice (liturgical, ecclesial, pastoral, and so on).

Arguments and debates will no doubt continue over the relative degree of subjectivity and objectivity in understanding of beauty, and the debate is not an unimportant one. The medieval theologian and philosopher Duns Scotus (1265/6–1308) introduced a concept that came to be called *haecceitas*, the 'thisness', the particularity, of each person, each creature, each thing. This idea was seized on by the British Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), who saw the presence of God in all things, for all were created by God, or as he puts it in the final lines of his poem, 'Pied Beauty', all things 'He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: / Praise him.' In this sense, a key task of theology is to reflect on and reflect the creative and transformative power of God at work in the world, and this conference was an opportunity to engage in that task, sharing with and learning from other disciplines at the same time.